

THE WORK ADJUSTMENT OF EXPATRIATE TEACHERS EMPLOYED IN CHINESE
INTERNATIONALIZED SCHOOLS: A HERMENEUTICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Adrian Marcin Golis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. The theory guiding the study was Dawis and Lofquist's theory of work adjustment. This theory explained the process of employee adjustment at the workplace as the result of job dissatisfaction leading to attempts at restoring the person-environment fit. The central research question was: How do expatriate teachers experience work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools? The four sub-questions addressed the facets of work adjustment: activeness, reactivity, perseverance, and flexibility. Chinese internationalized schools were an appropriate setting for the study because of the extraordinary work adjustment challenges in these institutions. The study employed a purposefully selected sample of 16 expatriate teachers who have worked in Chinese internationalized schools for at least one school year and have experienced work adjustment. Three data collection methods aided in gathering in-depth descriptions of participants' lived experiences: individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. Data analysis relied on eclectic coding and van Manen's hermeneutical framework. Four major themes summarized participants' work adjustment experiences: discovering what lies behind the façade, trying to be a real teacher, navigating relationships with the paying customers, and trying to function in a multicultural work environment. Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory aided the interpretation of findings and linked participants' adjustment attempts to unfulfilled needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Keywords: expatriate teachers, international education, Chinese internationalized schools, expatriate adjustment, work adjustment

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all the teachers, local and expatriate, who tirelessly contribute their energy and expertise to the students in Chinese internationalized schools. With deep respect, I want to acknowledge the immense challenges they face every day and express my admiration for their unwavering commitment. Their struggles are noted.

Acknowledgments

This has been quite a journey! I would never have made it without the support of my professors at Liberty University. I extend my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chair and mentor, Dr. Laura Jones, for her expertise and kindness. Her tactful feedback, constructive criticism, and insightful assessments have been fundamental to my academic growth. My sincere thanks go to my committee member and methodologist, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, who believed in me and encouraged me to do my best. I am also grateful to Dr. Sarah Pannone and Dr. Heather Strafaccia for their support during my doctoral journey.

I express my gratitude to my supervisors and coworkers at the internationalized school in Guangzhou, where I had the privilege of working for the past five years. I am thankful to them for making my work adjustment (almost) painless. I acknowledge that no expatriate teachers from my school participated in this study, and my respondents' experiences and opinions do not necessarily reflect my own.

Finally, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all the research participants who generously gave me their time and shared their experiences, contributing to the findings presented in my dissertation. This study would not have been possible without them.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
Table of Contents	7
List of Tables	10
List of Abbreviations	11
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	12
Overview.....	12
Background.....	12
Problem Statement	19
Purpose Statement.....	21
Significance of the Study	21
Research Questions.....	23
Definitions.....	24
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	27
Overview.....	27
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Related Literature.....	31
Summary.....	70
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	71

Overview.....	71
Research Design.....	71
Research Questions.....	74
Setting and Participants.....	74
Researcher Positionality.....	77
Procedures.....	82
Data Collection Plan.....	86
Trustworthiness.....	103
Summary.....	110
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	111
Overview.....	111
Participants.....	111
Results.....	128
Research Question Responses.....	169
Summary.....	177
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	178
Overview.....	178
Discussion.....	178
Conclusion.....	207
References.....	210
Appendix A.....	251
Appendix B.....	252
Appendix C.....	253

Appendix D.....	256
Appendix E.....	257
Appendix F.....	258
Appendix G.....	259
Appendix H.....	260
Appendix I.....	261
Appendix J.....	262

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	113
Table 2. Overview of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Code Categories.....	129

List of Abbreviations

Assigned Expatriate (AE)

Chinese Internationalized Schools (CIS)

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Expatriate Teacher (ET)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

International Baccalaureate (IB)

Local Teacher (LT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE)

Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In response to the demand of the growing middle class for world-standard education, a new form of international school has gained popularity in China in the last two decades. Chinese internationalized schools cater to local students but emulate traditional international schools and employ teachers from overseas who face extraordinary adjustment challenges in their daily work. The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. This chapter explains the historical, social, and theoretical context of the phenomenon. It connects the adjustment of expatriate teachers to the transformation of the international school industry, the increase in global mobility, and the growing interest in the lives of expatriates. The problem and purpose statements are presented, the study's significance is explained, and the research questions are listed. The chapter concludes with the definitions of key terms.

Background

Background information about the research context can guide an understanding of work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools (CIS). The following sections outline the historical, social, and theoretical context of the current study. The work adjustment of expatriate teachers (ETs) employed in CIS is grounded in the expansion of the international school industry, the increase in expatriation, and the growing interest in the work adjustment of various expatriate groups in recent decades.

Historical Context

The first international schools, among them the famous International College at Spring Grove, London, date back to the middle of the nineteenth century (Sylvester, 2002). The two

international schools in Geneva and Yokohama, both founded in 1924, established a model for the future of international education (Bunnell, 2016; Hayden, 2006). The first International Baccalaureate (IB) courses started in 1962 and standardized the industry (Fox, 1998; Hill, 2002). In the 1960s, the existing 400 international schools were chiefly located in European capital cities, catered to expatriate families, and remained beyond the reach of the local populations (Leach, 1969). However, a dramatic increase in global mobility in the 1990s led to an unsatiated demand for international schools in many parts of the world (Alfaraidy, 2020; Kim & Mobrand, 2019). Moreover, the growing middle class in developing countries like China understood the benefits of globally oriented education, increasingly had the means to pay for it, and thus created a rising demand for internationalized schools (Kong et al., 2020; M. Lee et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). CIS cater to local students, employ local and expatriate educators, and deliver a blend of local and international curricula in Mandarin Chinese and English (Poole, 2020a).

In 1989, over 80% of international school students worldwide were expatriate children; in contrast, 80% of the children currently enrolled in international and internationalized schools in Asia are from local middle-class families (Bunnell, 2022; Wickins & Edwards, 2018). For-profit internationalized schools became the standard of private education in developing countries (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). Numerous private schools rebranded to internationalized schools, and new internationalized schools were founded, selling the desired international label and assurances of superior quality (Alfaraidy, 2020; Kim, 2019). These institutions promise an advantage to their customers through “making and remaking elites” (Howard, 2022, p. 6) and educating future leaders (Howard & Maxwell, 2023). The industry expanded rapidly, in unforeseen ways, and largely unnoticed by the local state regulators, a phenomenon termed *stealth marketization* (Kim & Mobrand, 2019) or *crypto-growth* (Bunnell, 2022).

The first research into the work adjustment of ETs was published in the early years of the new millennium and remained fragmentary and disconnected. Stirzaker (2004) emphasized the value of effective staff induction for the organizational fit and work adjustment of ETs in international schools and offered guidelines for successful onboarding programs. In a study of ETs employed in an international school in Thailand, Deveney (2007) reported that the participants felt unprepared for multicultural teaching and attempted various work adjustments, such as changing their teaching strategies to match learner needs, seeking support from their coworkers, and in some cases, lowering their expectations of the students. L.-Y. Lee and Van Vorst (2010) found a connection between the work adjustment of ETs working in cram schools in Taiwan, the length of stay in the country, the support of local coworkers (but not expatriate coworkers), and the competence of host country nationals.

In her study of ETs employed in international schools in the United Arab Emirates, Sunder (2013) reported educators' struggles in working with students who were uncommunicative in English and the challenges of curriculum adaptation to meet local sensitivities. Roskell (2013) offered vivid examples of expatriate maladjustment and its consequences for a small, internationalized school in Southeast Asia. Her study participants struggled with low standards, insufficient support, weak leadership, lack of professional development, and low student ability. The ETs felt unsupported, deskilled, and de-professionalized and consequently rejected work adjustment by executing their duties with minimal effort. Moreover, the conceptual papers by Halicioglu (2015) and Zhou and Li (2016) offered reflections on ETs' pedagogical adjustments without contributing empirical research.

Other early studies of cross-cultural adjustment in samples of ETs (e.g., Chu & Morrison, 2011; Ren et al., 2013; W. Richardson et al., 2006; von Kirchenheim & Richardson, 2005) did

not distinguish between the different facets of adjustment, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the work context. However, the work adjustment of general expatriate groups has been studied extensively (Brewster et al., 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020; Reade & McKenna, 2022). Scholarly interest in how expatriates experience work adjustment gained momentum in the 1990s after the seminal studies by Black (1988) and Black et al. (1991). In the last three decades, several authors explored the work adjustment of mixed expatriate groups, assigned expatriates, self-initiated expatriates, and expatriate academics (Brewster et al., 2021).

Social Context

Modern international schools differ from the traditional international schools of the twentieth century (Bunnell et al., 2021). The difference between international, internationalized, bilingual, and private schools became blurred, and a trend of commercialization appeared across the industry (Beek, 2023; Bryant, 2018; Kim, 2019; S. Liu, 2020; Poole, 2020a, 2020b). International schools, particularly in their localized, internationalized form, are now primarily profit-based and mainly cater to local middle-class families (Bunnell, 2019b; Wickins & Edwards, 2018). The industry is highly stratified, and since the emergence of the nonpremium sector, the assumed exclusiveness and elite status of international schools have become questionable (Bunnell, 2021a; Bunnell et al., 2021; Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Goh, 2020). Thus, the international education market became an “education supermarket” with various choices and price tags (Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019, p. 127).

The motivations to seek enrollment in internationalized schools vary. Many parents in developing countries are determined to give their children a competitive edge in domestic and global markets in careers related to trade, finance, and leadership (Bryant, 2018; Bunnell et al.,

2020; Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Goh, 2020; Kim & Mobrand, 2019; C. Maxwell et al., 2020; Yemini et al., 2022). On the other hand, some affluent parents want to evade the limitations of local school systems and offer their children a worldly perspective conveyed by globally recognized curricula and international teachers (Alfaraidy, 2020). Other parents might see internationalized schools as safe havens shielding their low-performing children from the grueling competition of local education (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). Regardless of the reasons for choosing private education, attending an internationalized school might symbolize status and distinction for many families (Bunnell, 2021a).

A specific ET profile, mainly White and of Anglo-Saxon origin, fits within the image internationalized schools try to convey (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; see also Dos Santos, 2020, 2022). However, recruiting and retaining educators in international schools remains challenging in the era of global teacher shortages (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Murdock, 2022; Stroud Stasel, 2022). The demand for ETs in China greatly surpassed the supply (Bunnell & Poole, 2022, 2023; Poole, 2020b). Although non-native speakers fluent in English can become teachers in international and internationalized schools, hiring practices tend to lean toward educators of certain nationalities (Beek, 2023).

Some consider China one of the three most popular destinations for expatriation because of abundant growth opportunities and relatively high salaries for overseas personnel (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023). However, in the *Expat Insider 2023: The World Through Expat Eyes* (InterNations, 2023) survey, China ranked 26th out of 53 destinations and 45th in the work-life balance satisfaction category. Among the respondents, 69% were content with their finances, but many found the Chinese working culture old-fashioned and limiting.

Furthermore, due to severe internet restrictions and censorship, China ranked last among all the studied destinations in the digital life category.

Workplace adjustment in China is particularly challenging due to the language barrier, frequent lack of meaningful relationships with local coworkers, hierarchical organizational structures, overwhelming cultural novelty, and role ambiguity in the workplace (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022). Resentment by local coworkers is common due to miscommunication, lack of cultural understanding, and unequal job opportunities (Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). In a study of 274 self-initiated expatriates employed in four Chinese cities, Jannesari and Sullivan (2021) found a positive correlation between trust in local coworkers and expatriate adjustment. In another study, the same authors reported that high resilience moderated the impact of stressors on expatriate leaving intentions, but cultural adjustment did not increase the chances of expatriate retention (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2022).

Maladjusted ETs show low instructional effectiveness and poor mental health (Stroud Stasel, 2022). However, CIS constitute exceptional adjustment challenges for their international faculties because of a blend of local and global elements, commercialization, and customer-service orientation (Poole, 2020a; Sunder, 2013). Work adjustment might also be encumbered by the challenging Chinese work culture, language barriers, coexistence alongside the local educators, and the privileged yet precarious status of ETs in China (Bunnell, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022). Furthermore, the expatriates working in CIS are not necessarily qualified teachers and often pursue teaching abroad as career changers and accidental teachers without formal teaching preparation (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell & Poole, 2022).

Theoretical Context

International education, expatriation, and the professional lives of geographically mobile

employees have gained unprecedented scholarly interest in recent decades. This interest led to theoretical conceptualizations of international schools, expatriates in general, and ETs. Hayden and Thompson (2013) divided international schools into traditional (Type A and Type B) and nontraditional (Type C). In the Chinese context, CIS can be seen as a variant of Type C international schools catering to local students within the restrictions of the Chinese educational landscape (Poole, 2020a). Moreover, a popular expatriate typology clarified the motivations of expatriates to work abroad by dividing globally mobile employees into four categories: explorers, refugees, architects, and mercenaries (J. Richardson & McKenna, 2002). Lastly, a typology of ETs identified the motivations of international educators and distinguished between individuals teaching abroad to pay for travel (Type A), influence students' lives (Type B), or support a prolonged stay abroad (Type C; Bailey & Cooker, 2019).

Research into expatriate adjustment gained momentum in the 1990s after Black et al. (1991) proposed a widely cited model of sociocultural adjustment consisting of three facets: general, interaction, and work adjustment. Although the model has received criticism for its weak conceptualizations and limited scope (X. Chen et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2018), it remains popular because of its validated measurements of the three adjustment subscales (Chew et al., 2021; Y. Han et al., 2022; Templer, 2020; Tsegaye et al., 2019). Other expatriate adjustment models can be found in the literature (e.g., Aycan, 1997; Haslberger et al., 2014; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Ward et al., 1998) but are less frequently cited.

The theory of work adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) provides an extensive framework for exploring adjustment in professional settings. The theory views job dissatisfaction as the result of person-environment discorrespondence. The lack of fit manifests as a conflict between employee needs and expectations and their factual fulfillment at the workplace. An

individual whose requirements remain unsatisfied does not immediately leave the job but attempts to adjust the environment and self to reduce the person-environment discordance. Activeness, reactivity, flexibility, and perseverance constitute the four essential components of work adjustment and explain how work adjustment is attempted (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Because of its comprehensiveness, TWA offers a suitable framework for exploring the work adjustment of various employee groups, including ETs.

TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) acknowledges that the lack of job satisfaction is the starting point of work adjustment processes. Until the 1960s, remuneration was assumed to be the strongest source of job satisfaction (Soto & Rojas, 2019), but Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory of motivation challenged this belief. In Herzberg's model, motivators such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, growth, and career advancement lead to employee satisfaction. However, their absence causes a lack of job satisfaction rather than job dissatisfaction (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). In contrast, job dissatisfaction is triggered by a different set of variables called hygiene factors, including company policy and administration, supervision, professional relationships, work conditions, remuneration, personal life, status, and security (Herzberg, 1968). The most notable outcome of Herzberg's theory is the realization that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not the opposite ends of a continuum but two coexisting states (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). Therefore, improving hygiene factors such as salary does not automatically increase job satisfaction but merely reduces job dissatisfaction.

Problem Statement

The problem is the job dissatisfaction of ETs employed in CIS resulting in work adjustment. CIS are nontraditional international schools characterized by a blend of local and international curricula delivered by local and international educators, the coexistence of

Mandarin Chinese and English as languages of instruction, and a homogenous student body consisting mainly of children from local middle-class families (Poole, 2020a). Although expatriates in China are satisfied with their salaries, their work satisfaction is below the global average (InterNations, 2023). Workplace adjustment in China is particularly challenging due to the language barrier, frequent lack of meaningful relationships with local coworkers, hierarchical organizational structures, overwhelming cultural novelty, and role ambiguity in the workplace (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022). Resentment by local coworkers is common due to miscommunication, lack of cultural understanding, and unequal job opportunities (Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). Despite their privileged positions, ETs often report feeling marginalized and undervalued in their host country schools (Everitt, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Murdock, 2022). Moreover, employment in CIS might entail the precarious privilege of being highly desirable as an international employee but not treated seriously as a teacher (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Poole, 2020b; Poole et al., 2022).

Work stress, mental health issues, and low teaching performance can often be observed among maladjusted ETs (Roskell, 2013; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022). Poor work adjustment can also lead employees to quit their jobs prematurely and abruptly (Akhil & Liu, 2019; X. Chen et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021). Despite the severity of these problems for the sustainability of CIS and the achievement of growing numbers of students receiving international education, the literature on expatriate educators in China remains scarce and fragmentary (Bunnell, 2022). Moreover, very little is known about work adjustment in international schools (Fernández-Álvarez et al., 2022; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022; Templer, 2020). Although the experiences and struggles of international educators attract growing attention, no research exists on work

adjustment in CIS (Koh & Sin, 2020). Understanding the lived experiences of ETs experiencing job dissatisfaction and attempting work adjustment can help narrow this gap in research.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. For this study, work adjustment was defined through the lens of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) as the behaviors attempted by an individual experiencing job dissatisfaction aimed at restoring the person-environment fit at the workplace (Dawis, 2005; Dawis et al., 1968). These behaviors can take two forms. Employees either demonstrate activeness by attempting to change their work environment or reactivity, that is, efforts to adapt the self to the work environment. Flexibility constitutes the degree of dissatisfaction the employee can tolerate before attempting adjustment, and perseverance describes how long an individual attempts adjustment behaviors before deciding to leave the job. Using TWA as a framework, this study explored the different facets of work adjustment in CIS and explained how the lived experiences of working in these institutions facilitate the work adjustment of ETs.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contributions to the theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge base. The present research enriched the scarce literature on ETs by exploring adjustment, a work outcome that is not well understood for specific expatriate groups (Guo et al., 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). The focus on a particular educational setting, namely CIS, reflected the unprecedented growth of the international school industry in the last decades that scholarship has only recently started to address (Bryant, 2018; Bunnell, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Bunnell et al., 2020). A qualitative

methodology was a welcome addition to the primarily quantitative applications of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of the current study lies in its unconventional analytical approach. The diverse applications of TWA have included career exploration, counseling, employee performance improvement, retirement adjustment, and organizational leadership transformation (Swanson & Schneider, 2013, 2021). However, most research applying the theory has been quantitative (Dawis, 2005). As a qualitative approach lends itself well to exploring a field that calls for new methodologies, this research extended the application of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) by employing a phenomenological lens. A sample of culturally diverse ETs presented work adjustment in a new light (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Fouad, 2020).

Empirical Significance

This study viewed the work adjustment of ETs through the lens of hermeneutical phenomenology by giving the participants a voice and attempting a deep, rich explanation of a phenomenon that was not well understood for this population (Fernández-Álvarez et al., 2022; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022; Templer, 2020). Numerous studies have advanced the understanding of expatriate work adjustment over the last decades (Brewster et al., 2021; Harari et al., 2018; Schlaegel et al., 2021). However, despite the expansion of the international school industry and the growing significance of ETs worldwide, educator samples in expatriate adjustment studies have mainly included academics (Burford et al., 2020; Koh & Sin, 2020; Schartner et al., 2023; Wilkins & Annabi, 2023). The current study added to the growing research base on international schools, ETs and their work experiences, and the Chinese private school industry. Moreover, the

present study enriched the growing body of research on the privileged yet precarious status of ETs (Bunnell, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022).

Practical Significance

Working abroad involves numerous challenges (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Harry et al., 2019; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Ngonyama-Ndou, 2020; Stroud Stasel, 2021). The attrition of expatriate employees, including teachers, remains exceptionally high and has been reported to reach up to 70% in developing countries (W. Richardson et al., 2006; Stroud Stasel, 2022). The unusually high turnover rates of ETs in CIS constitute one of the biggest problems for the sustainability of these institutions (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kostogriz et al., 2022).

Understanding how ETs adjust at work is of critical importance due to the high cost associated with recruiting and retaining expatriates and the low productivity shown by maladjusted employees (Akhil & Liu, 2019; X. Chen et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021; Davies et al., 2019; Harari et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2021; von Kirichenheim & Richardson, 2005). Therefore, the practical significance of this study lies in its potential to impact the recruitment, management, and retention of ETs in CIS and improve the sustainability of these institutions.

Research Questions

Research questions foreshadow the study's intent and specify the researcher's focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The central research question is situated at the heart of the phenomenon under study: the work adjustment of ETs in CIS. Because the meaning of the phenomenon is complex, the sub-questions correspond to the essential components of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). While the central research question captures the essence of the phenomenon, the sub-questions explore its various facets.

Central Research Question

How do expatriate teachers experience work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question One

What are expatriate teachers' experiences of adjusting their work environments (activeness) in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question Two

What are expatriate teachers' experiences of adjusting to their work environments (reactiveness) in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question Three

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience flexibility in work adjustment?

Sub-Question Four

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience perseverance in work adjustment?

Definitions

1. *Activeness* - One of the four adjustment style variables in the process model of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It involves an individual's attempts at changing the work environment to restore the person-environment fit and reduce job dissatisfaction (Dawis, 2005).
2. *Adjustment* - An individual's capability for effective personal and professional functioning in a new environment (von Kirckenheim & Richardson, 2005).

3. *Chinese internationalized school* - A type of nontraditional international school in China characterized by a blend of local and international curricula delivered by local and expatriate teachers, the coexistence of Mandarin Chinese and English as languages of instruction, and a homogenous student body consisting mainly of children from local middle-class families (Poole, 2020a).
4. *Expatriate teachers* - Geographically mobile individuals employed in educational institutions located outside their passport countries (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell & Poole, 2022).
5. *Flexibility* - One of the four adjustment style variables in the process model of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It describes the degree of dissatisfaction with the work environment tolerated by an individual before attempting adjustment (Dawis, 2005).
6. *International schools* - K-12 schools delivering, at least partially, a nonlocal curriculum in English, located usually outside an English-speaking country (Bunnell, 2019a, 2022).
7. *Perseverance* - One of the four adjustment style variables in the process model of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It reflects how long an individual persists in work adjustment attempts before leaving the job (Dawis, 2005).
8. *Reactiveness* - One of the four adjustment style variables in the process model of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It involves an individual's attempts at changing the self to meet the demands of the work environment (Dawis, 2005).
9. *Theory of work adjustment* - A complex explanation of the processes of adjustment at the workplace from the perspective of a person-environment fit (Dawis, 2005; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

10. *Work adjustment* - The behaviors and attitudes attempted by an individual experiencing job dissatisfaction aimed at restoring the person-environment fit at the workplace (Dawis, 2005; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. Work adjustment was viewed through the lens of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) as the result of job dissatisfaction leading to attempts at restoring the person-environment fit. The work adjustment of expatriate teachers was linked to the increase in expatriation in the globalized world, the growing interest in the adjustment of various expatriate groups, and the transformation of the international school industry. Chinese internationalized schools were characterized as commercialized institutions catering mainly to local students, combining local and international school elements, using Mandarin Chinese and English for instruction, and employing educators from overseas alongside local ones (Poole, 2020a). These schools pose exceptional adjustment challenges to their overseas faculties because of their commercial character, customer-service orientation, and a blend of local and international school elements (Bunnell, 2019b; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; Poole, 2020a). Moreover, the educators employed in Chinese internationalized schools are often career changers and accidental teachers with no formal teaching qualifications (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell & Poole, 2022). Understanding the lived experiences of work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools can extend the applications of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), assist the recruitment, management, and retention of overseas educators, and improve sustainability and productivity in internationalized schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore the problem of work adjustment of expatriate teachers working in Chinese internationalized schools. This chapter provides a review of the current research on the topic. The first section addresses the theoretical framework, followed by a synthesis of the recent literature about the international school industry and the role of expatriate teachers. Then, research surrounding the job satisfaction of expatriate teachers is discussed to foreshadow a synthesis of the recent literature on the work adjustment of this professional group and expatriates in general. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of work adjustment (TWA) offers a complex, multifaceted description of processes occurring at the workplace (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It was intended to improve the person (P) - environment (E) fit in work contexts and aid professionals in counseling the workforce in organizations (Dawis, 2005). TWA defines P as the worker or the employee and E as the employer, the work organization, or the broadly understood work environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). The theory captures the labor relationship between P and E to predict satisfaction and tenure (Dawis, 2000a). Lofquist and Dawis originated TWA in the 1960s as part of a large, longitudinal project conducted at the University of Minnesota (Dawis, 2000b). Since then, the theory has included several updates and revisions based on incoming research findings (Dawis et al., 1964, 1968; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969, 1991).

Key Concepts

The primary assumption of TWA is the *reciprocity* of the labor relationship, that is, acknowledging that P and E have something to offer that the other needs (Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Schneider, 2021). The organization has task requirements crucial to its sustainability and growth that can be fulfilled with an employee's skills and abilities (Swanson & Fouad, 2020). On the other hand, workers need employer reinforcers, such as pay, prestige, or adequate working conditions, to satisfy their needs (Dawis, 2005). The labor relationship between P and E is, thus, based on a mutually beneficial exchange.

Satisfied employees perform better than dissatisfied ones and achieve higher satisfactoriness (Swanson & Schneider, 2021). *Satisfactoriness* describes the quality of being able to satisfy the needs of another party (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Therefore, P satisfactoriness means that the worker is capable of satisfying the organization's needs. Conversely, E satisfactoriness means the employer can fulfill the employee's needs. In a perfect case, the labor exchange leads to P's satisfaction with E's reinforcers and E's satisfaction with P's skills and abilities, or P and E's satisfactoriness (Dawis, 2005).

A P-E *correspondence* occurs if the parties' mutual needs are satisfied (Dawis, 2005). Conversely, a lack of fit leads to a P-E *discorrespondence*, which is the starting point of work adjustment. The TWA basic predictive model explained that achieving P-E correspondence through P satisfaction and satisfactoriness leads to "a state of harmonious equilibrium" (Swanson & Schneider, 2013, p. 33) and, consequently, *tenure*, or a sustained labor relationship (Swanson & Fouad, 2020). However, the lack of job satisfaction may ultimately drive the employee to leave the company. On the other hand, the absence of P satisfactoriness may cause employer dissatisfaction with the worker and ultimately lead to dismissal (Dawis, 2005).

The TWA expanded predictive model introduced a category of other factors as potential moderator variables in predicting tenure (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Other factors may include individual interests, personality, family variables, or the labor market, but the predictive model did not consider them in detail (Dawis, 2005). However, TWA distinguished four personality style variables that describe P's typical response to E (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018). These are *celerity*, or quickness with which P initiates a response to E; *pace*, or response effort (e.g., high or low energy); *rhythm*, or the pattern of interaction pace (e.g., steady, cyclical, or erratic); and *endurance*, or length of time P stays in interaction with E (Dawis, 2000a; Swanson & Schneider, 2021). The variation in personality styles explains different behavioral patterns among employees with similar abilities and values (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018).

The Process Model

The TWA process model (Dawis, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) constitutes the theoretical framework of the current study and guides the research questions. The process model revealed that P's satisfaction with E's reinforcers and E's satisfaction with P's skills and abilities lead to *maintenance behavior*, that is, a continued, unaltered labor relationship (Dawis, 2005). However, the lack of satisfaction or satisfactoriness does not immediately cause employment termination because employees and employers tend to attempt adjustment behaviors first (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). *Flexibility* describes how long P endures dissatisfaction with E before attempting adjustment, and *perseverance* defines how long the employee typically continues adjustment behavior before deciding to leave the job (Swanson & Schneider, 2021). Conversely, E flexibility describes how long the work organization tolerates dissatisfaction with the worker before initiating adjustment, and E perseverance defines how long this adjustment is attempted.

Work adjustment can take two forms: *activeness*, or proactive adjustment, and *reactiveness*, that is, adaptive adjustment (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Dawis, 2000b). Activeness describes P's work adjustment as attempts to change the work environment or working conditions to match P's expectations. On the other hand, reactiveness means the worker attempts a change in self to minimize job dissatisfaction. For example, teachers might show activeness by rearranging their classrooms to their needs and reactiveness by altering their expectations of their students.

Flexibility, perseverance, activeness, and reactiveness are termed *adjustment style variables* and are the newest components of TWA (Dawis, 2005). Adjustment style variables explain how a cyclical work adjustment process is initiated and maintained (Swanson & Fouad, 2020). In practice, P can, at a given time, be in any of the four states: (a) satisfied and satisfactory, which leads to P and E maintenance behavior and tenure; (b) dissatisfied but satisfactory, which might lead to P activeness or reactiveness; (c) satisfied but unsatisfactory, which might lead to E activeness or reactiveness; and (d) dissatisfied and unsatisfactory, which might lead to P and E activeness or reactiveness (Dawis, 2002, 2005).

Theory Applications

Over time, TWA found validation in numerous studies of career exploration, job counseling, and employee performance improvement (Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Schneider, 2013, 2021). Recently, the theory was employed to understand the causes of workplace complaints among Chinese managers (Yuan & Gao, 2022), work outcomes and self-esteem of women of color in the United States (Velez et al., 2018), and turnover intentions of migrant workers in South Korea (Choi et al., 2017). Furthermore, TWA has recently served as a framework for a study of job satisfaction and work engagement among American full-time and

substitute teachers (Topchyan & Woehler, 2021). The theory has also been applied to understand general, interaction, and work adjustment in an international sample of expatriate employees (Chew et al., 2021). It should be noted that studies employing TWA have been almost exclusively quantitative (for rare exceptions, see Eggerth & Flynn, 2012; Flynn et al., 2015; Fouad et al., 2017).

Although numerous instruments have been developed to gauge various aspects of work adjustment, measuring the style variables (i.e., flexibility, perseverance, activeness, and reactivity) is particularly difficult because no validated instruments are currently available (Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Schneider, 2021). The present study can potentially lend itself to the development of such an instrument. Dawis (2005) acknowledged that “support for a theory is more robust when it comes from the use of other instruments and other methodologies and analytic approaches” (p. 15). Therefore, novel research approaches to validating TWA are encouraged (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Fouad, 2020). Moreover, Swanson and Schneider (2021) explicitly called for more research on the TWA process model in culturally diverse populations. The current study utilizes the TWA process model as its theoretical framework. It can potentially advance the theory by employing a qualitative, phenomenological lens to explore the work adjustment of a culturally diverse population, the ETs working in CIS.

Related Literature

The following sections examine the recent literature in four major research streams constituting the background of the study: international education, expatriate educators, their job satisfaction, and their work adjustment. First, Chinese internationalized schools (CIS), a localized form of nontraditional international schools, are considered in the context of the recent

expansion and diversification of the international education industry. The expatriate teachers (ETs) working in these institutions are portrayed as a subgroup of the general expatriate population. Their status, motivations, and struggles are situated in China's changing social and educational landscape. Current research on the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of ETs completes the picture of the conditions influencing work adjustment. Lastly, the scarce research on the work adjustment of ETs is presented and complemented with more extensive findings from studies with general expatriate samples.

International Education

Bunnell (2019a) identified three main characteristics of international schools: a global orientation, a location usually outside an English-speaking country, and a nonlocal curriculum delivered at least partially in English. In practice, the international label often only means that a local school uses English to convey some of its curriculum (Bunnell et al., 2016). The rapid and unforeseen growth of the industry presents new opportunities in a field that remains under-researched and undertheorized (Bryant, 2018; Bunnell, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Bunnell et al., 2020;). There are currently over 13,000 international schools worldwide, and their number is expected to double by the end of the decade (Bunnell, 2021a; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; International School Consultancy Research [ISCR], 2023). The global education industry warrants attention not only because of its rapid growth but also because of the impact international schools have on increasing numbers of students and the overall educational landscape in times of cosmopolitan nationalism (Bryant, 2018; Bunnell, 2020, 2021a; C. Maxwell et al., 2020; Yemini et al., 2022).

In 2000, about one million students attended international schools worldwide, a number which increased more than sixfold within twenty years (Bunnell, 2022). In October 2023, there

were 13,614 international schools worldwide, employing 649,960 staff and generating a fee income of 58 billion US dollars (ISCR, 2023). As a result of the “great Asian international school gold rush” (Machin, 2017, p. 131), most international schools (57%) are currently located in Asia and the Middle East, and China sees their highest concentration with an 8.5% global market share and 194 schools in Shanghai alone (Bunnell et al., 2020; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; M. Lee et al., 2022; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020a; Woods & Kong, 2020; Wright et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). Because of the corporatization of the industry, most international schools are operated by large, profit-driven companies with transnational capital (Bunnell, 2021a; Kim, 2019).

The stereotype of a focused, achievement-oriented, and disciplined Asian school does not always apply to private education institutions (Wright & Lee, 2022). Commercialization, profit seeking, and customer-oriented services distinguish private schools from public and traditional international schools (Poole & Bunnell, 2021). Although international education institutions in Asia often attract talented students, they might also serve as an escape route for students who struggle in public schools (Wu & Koh, 2022). Therefore, the working conditions in these organizations differ greatly from those of local public schools and are characterized by a focus on brand promotion, student recruitment and retention, and customer service (Wu & Koh, 2022).

International School Typology

In a widely cited typology of international schools, Hayden and Thompson (2013) labeled schools catering to expatriate children as Type A international schools. From today’s perspective, Type A international schools are not distinctly different from the rare Type B ideological international schools. The latter focus on spreading world peace and might offer scholarships for promising local students (Bunnell, 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Wickins

& Edwards, 2018). Traditional and ideological international schools have always been private, elite, nonprofit institutions catering to the children of foreign diplomats and business expatriates (Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Hughes, 2020).

Type A and Type B international schools adhere to idealistic goals of character building, activism, and fostering meaningful relationships (Bunnell, 2021a, 2022; Goh, 2020; Hughes, 2020). The unique features of international mindedness and organizational unity are enhanced through the practice of multiple F's, including foreign languages, flags, food, faces, features, folklore, fundraising, faiths, fine arts, and foreign trips (Bunnell, 2019b; Howard, 2022). The schools operate independently from the local education systems and constitute small islands outside the host countries' purview (Bryant, 2018; Kim, 2019; Stroud Stasel, 2021). Type A and Type B international schools focus on serving expatriate communities while remaining politically neutral and largely uninvolved with the educational systems of their host countries (Bunnell, 2021a; Hughes, 2020; Prosser, 2020).

In contrast, Type C nontraditional international schools, among them CIS, are chiefly profit-driven, often nonpremium institutions owned by transnational educational conglomerates that chiefly serve students from local middle-class families (Beek, 2023; Bunnell, 2019a; Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; M. Lee et al., 2022; Poole, 2020b; Ying & Wright, 2023). Type C schools offer globally recognized curricular programs like International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Level (A Level), or Advanced Placement (AP) but often include a significant local curricular component and preparation for local, state-mandated exams (Howard, 2022; Poole, 2017; Wickins & Edwards, 2018; Wu & Koh, 2022). Nontraditional international schools can include different organizational forms: state

or private bilingual schools, state schools with international departments, or local-foreign cooperatives (Beek, 2023; Kim, 2019).

Satellite Schools

Satellite schools are overseas branches of established Western schools founded usually in developing countries by local-foreign cooperatives (Bunnell et al., 2020; Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kim, 2019). Dulwich College and Harrow, two prestigious English public schools, founded their first overseas campuses in Thailand in the late 1990s. This risky venture was inspired by the success of a franchise model first introduced by universities opening international branch campuses in the 1950s (Escriva-Beltran et al., 2019). The formation of satellite schools allows elite British public schools to maintain a charity status at home while increasing revenue and scholarship funding for the parent campus (Bunnell et al., 2020). Because the British economy benefits from the income generated by satellite schools abroad, the UK government supported the efforts to increase the number of overseas British franchise schools as part of the 2019 “Education is GREAT” campaign (Department for Education & Department of International Trade, 2019).

Apart from elite British schools, numerous educational institutions from other English-speaking countries have established their satellite campuses in Asian cities, and many of them are second-rank schools forming a nonpremium market niche (Bryant, 2018; Bunnell et al., 2020; Ying & Wright, 2023). Parent schools export not only their brands and curricula but also compelling imagery of status, tradition, and distinction, expressed in imposing campus architecture, rituals, dress code, school rules, and promotional materials in a way that appeals to the Asian middle class (Kong et al., 2020; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). The financial success of

the overseas franchise model appears to outweigh the risk of losing the legitimacy of the parent school (Bunnell, 2022; Bunnell et al., 2020).

In 2018, there were almost 80 satellite campuses worldwide (Bunnell et al., 2020). Although satellite schools are now present in almost every Asian country, most of them are concentrated in China (Bunnell, 2021b, 2022; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Gibson & Bailey, 2021; Kong et al., 2020; Poole, 2020a; Woods & Kong, 2020). Franchising an educational brand from overseas became a way to sell local customers a promise of a bright future in the world's most prestigious universities (Bunnell, 2022). However, the reality is disillusioning as international school graduates usually attend lower-ranking universities and cluster in a few specific college destinations (Bunnell et al., 2021).

The Role of the International Baccalaureate

In response to the need for quality international education, IB became a central theme in the transformation of the global education industry because the brand provides much-needed legitimacy (M. Lee et al., 2022). IB started in 1968 in Geneva as a nonprofit initiative. Despite being a private entity without any formal authority over school systems, the International Baccalaureate Organization proved the value of its program as a successful path to university admission (Resnik, 2020; Tarc, 2022). The organization initially cooperated with traditional international schools and offered a gold standard of university preparation for expatriate children (Wright & Lee, 2022). IB currently works with nonprofit, for-profit, and publicly funded schools worldwide and offers four educational programs connecting 5,600 schools in 159 countries (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2023).

The strengths of IB lie in its empirically validated effectiveness, flexibility, transnationality, and recognition by leading universities (M. Lee et al., 2022). Its four programs

address students aged three to 19 and provide a progressive, holistic, and rigorous yet flexible pedagogical framework that successfully prepares for varied higher education paths (Resnik, 2020; Wright & Lee, 2022). Therefore, IB became a leading brand in the global education landscape and a desired partner for schools seeking a marketable educational approach (Tarc, 2022). Although IB now mainly serves as a selling point for internationalized schools, some countries and territories (e.g., the United States, Canada, South Korea, and Hong Kong) have recognized its potential for enriching or substituting local mainstream curricula (Beek, 2023; M. Lee et al., 2022; Resnik, 2020).

Regardless of the merits of IB, limited access to its programs can have undesired consequences (Maire & Windle, 2022). The goals of IB are idealistic and centered around international mindedness, the development of the whole person, and social justice. However, the IB framework often remains a highly effective university preparation program for the selected few (Tarc, 2022). Access to the programs is often restricted by socioeconomic status because, in most countries, IB is only offered by high-tuition schools or to selected students in public schools (Maire & Windle, 2022). Consequently, IB might be seen as a contributor to educational inequality and social stratification (Wright & Lee, 2022).

International School Industry in China

To clarify the market diversification within the international school industry in China, Poole (2020a) distinguished CIS as a unique school category standing in opposition to traditional international schools for expatriate children. Although CIS resemble Type C nontraditional international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), these institutions do not “fit easily within traditional and normative constructions of the international school” (Poole, 2020a, p. 449). Their services include a globally branded educational product targeting the aspiring middle class

(Kong et al., 2020; Wu & Koh, 2022). CIS share some common features: they cater to a homogenous, mainly local student body, provide varying levels of English-medium instruction, offer a combination of Chinese and international curricula in an East-meets-West fashion, and employ both local and expatriate educators (Poole et al., 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023). While the teachers working in traditional international schools mostly come from Anglo-Saxon countries and hold valid teaching licenses, the faculties in internationalized schools vary in nationality, cross-cultural capital, and teaching licensure status (Bunnell & Poole, 2022, 2023; Poole, 2020b). However, teacher recruitment in the international school industry leans toward candidates of certain nationalities, and discriminatory practices are common (Beek, 2023; see also Dos Santos, 2020).

Categorizing international schools in the Chinese context is difficult because the fusion of national and international elements takes various forms (Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Wu & Koh, 2022). Many types of CIS diversify the market, including local public schools with international divisions, foreign-local cooperatives, and private or bilingual schools with mixed curricula (Wright et al., 2022; Wu, 2020). Of the 1,168 international schools registered in China in 2019, 85% were internationalized schools for local students (Wu & Koh, 2022). Moreover, CIS increasingly appear in lower-tier cities and bring global education to Chinese families residing outside the largest urban centers (Poole et al., 2022).

Market Diversification

At elementary and junior high school levels, all Chinese students must complete the national, government-sanctioned curriculum (De Silva et al., 2020; Poole et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2022). Therefore, any foreign programs implemented in internationalized schools, like IB or the British International General Certificate of Secondary Education, can only be taught

alongside local courses (Poole, 2020a). In practice, it often leads to two tracks of study rather than content integration. However, high school education is not compulsory in China, so foreign programs can substitute the national curriculum at the upper secondary level. This allows more flexibility for international high schools (Wright et al., 2022). Consequently, the Chinese international high school market sees high diversification as the standards at this level are at the schools' discretion. Wu and Koh (2022) identified the three most common paths of international high school education based on the curriculum source: British-style, American-style, and Sino-Canadian.

“Internationally British” high schools constitute 35% of the market and function as satellite campuses marketing prestige and a sense of Britishness while offering A Level exam preparation (Wu & Koh, 2022, p. 57). The parent schools often show minimal involvement in branch management but receive 4-7% of the annual fee revenue. Similarly, American-style schools form loose partnerships with various US institutions without close supervision and often function as “a giant study-abroad agent” (Wu & Koh, 2022, p. 65). These schools mainly teach AP courses and occupy 34% of China's international high school market. In contrast, Sino-Canadian joint ventures, currently operating 90 schools in China, function as offshore campuses of Canadian provincial schools. They combine Chinese and Canadian curricula and often guarantee university admission in Canada upon program completion (Wu & Koh, 2022).

British, American, and Canadian high schools dominate China's international high school landscape. Although widespread at elementary and lower secondary levels, IB schools only occupy 13% of the international high school market (Wu & Koh, 2022). Students in the IB track prepare for the *Diploma Programme*, a globally recognized university entrance exam (M. Lee et al., 2022). Moreover, internationalized high schools following education systems of other

countries (e.g., Australia, Singapore, Japan) or offering local curricula with international additions constitute 18% of the international high school market (Wu & Koh, 2022).

Supply and Demand

The Chinese government is determined to shape the new generation with its ideology and political doctrine. Therefore, local children are forbidden from attending traditional international schools that operate largely beyond the government's purview (Wright et al., 2022). However, affluent middle-class families are willing to pay high tuition fees to send their children to internationalized schools where local students receive bilingual education and prepare for university admission abroad (M. Lee et al., 2022). In this context, CIS function as hybrids between local private schools and traditional international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). The Chinese curriculum is blended with a globally recognized curriculum such as IB, AP, or A Level and delivered by local teachers (LTs) and ETs (Howard, 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). Despite their global orientation, localized schools retain the characteristics of Chinese schools, such as compliance with government regulation, textbook censorship, and student participation in state-mandated exams (Bunnell, 2022).

In economically diversified China, graduating from a first-class domestic university increases the chances for success in the highly competitive labor market and often leads to employment in government-owned companies, which remain the most desired career path for many Asians (Ying & Wright, 2023). The entire effort of schooling from kindergarten to high school is, thus, directed at *gaokao*, the college entrance examination. Public key-point secondary schools offer a streamlined route to China's elite universities, but access to these schools is usually limited to the highest-performing students (Wright et al., 2022). The internationalized

schools operating in China provide an alternative route to quality education for the 400,000 students they serve.

Chinese families who choose internationalized schools for their children must accept extremely high tuition fees, averaging 250,000 yuan (approximately 34,246 US dollars) a year in Shanghai (Wright et al., 2022). The relative prestige of attending some CIS grants social capital to affluent middle-class families (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; Poole, 2020a; Poole et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). On the other hand, a common motivation to attend CIS is related to student ability. For less able students who struggled in mainstream education, an international track can become a sanctuary and an escape route from the grueling competition of the Chinese college entrance examination. Therefore, CIS sometimes serve as remedial schools (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022).

For the affluent Chinese middle class, the future employment of the new generation often lies in the growing private sector (Wright et al., 2022). CIS offer a path to a successful future because most of them aim at overseas college admission, and international college degrees can provide a competitive edge in the domestic labor market. Thus, the international education industry in China often serves as an alternative route for those who possess the financial means but lack the attitude, perseverance, or skills necessary to compete for first-class domestic diplomas and degrees (De Silva et al., 2020). To increase enrollment, nontraditional international schools rarely follow selective admission criteria and tend to accept all candidates, including those who do not meet the minimum English proficiency requirements (Poole et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022).

Graduating from a university abroad promises strong employability in China (Bunnell et al., 2020; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Wright et al., 2022). Thus, it is unsurprising that China currently has the highest number of international university students worldwide (Mok & Chan, 2020; Soong & Stahl, 2023). Studying abroad is rarely seen as a path to emigration and usually serves to increase employability back home. Students pursuing college education overseas tend to return to China after graduation to contribute to the domestic economy and the development of their motherland (Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Wright et al., 2022).

The expansion of the international school industry in China created a large, lucrative support industry that local parents, who usually lack personal experiences outside of mainstream domestic education, can employ when planning to send their children abroad (Ying & Wright, 2023). Chinese parents have always strived to give their children a competitive edge through intensive involvement in their educational paths, a phenomenon known as *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2003). Affluent families are willing to pay between 40,000 and 200,000 Chinese yuan (about 5,480 to 27,397 US dollars) to outsource their children's education to experts offering support services associated with international university paths (Ying & Wright, 2023). After-class cram and prep schools, college consultancies, and study-abroad agencies assist paying customers in seamlessly transitioning to overseas universities through tutoring, test preparation, counseling, and college application assistance (S. Liu, 2020; World Education Services, 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). These services ensure that local students are placed in colleges abroad and prepared for the overseas experience.

Increased Market Regulation

While the existence of international schools in the twentieth century had little influence on the host countries, the current scale of the international education industry often impacts

educational markets in Southeast Asia and the Middle East (Bunnell, 2021b, 2022; Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kim, 2019; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Murdock, 2022). Some host countries increasingly perceive the expansion of global education as a threat because growing numbers of students are attracted to international schools and thus avoid the local curricula (Alfaraidy, 2020; Bunnell, 2022; De Silva et al., 2020; Kim & Mobrand, 2019; Wright et al., 2022). Furthermore, international education providers foster English proficiency, but local governments might see the spread of Western-style education as a form of inverted neo-colonialism and a factor contributing to East-West ideological power struggles (Bunnell, 2022; Howard & Maxwell, 2023; You, 2020).

In some countries, local students can attend international schools with few restrictions, a situation common in Malaysia, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia (Alfaraidy, 2020). Other states, like South Korea, Singapore, Japan, and China, impose severe restrictions on international schools to protect their interests in shaping the young generation (Kim, 2019; Wickins & Edwards, 2018). In Indonesia, international schools came under state regulators' scrutiny after accusations of profit-driven practices leading to unsatisfactory educational outcomes (Kim, 2019). Consequently, all international education institutions in Indonesia had to remove the word "international" from their names, and foreign ownership of schools was forbidden (Bunnell et al., 2016).

Similar trends in curtailing the growth of the private education sector can be observed in China (De Silva et al., 2020; Poole et al., 2022). In July 2021, the Chinese government introduced a set of reforms called the double reduction policy aimed at easing student burden and education-related spending for families (Feng, 2022). The changes affected a vast commercial tutoring industry, both online and offline, with an estimated worth of two trillion Chinese yuan,

that is, approximately 274 billion US dollars (The Economist, 2021). All private after-school training institutions for school-aged children, notably, most of them training centers for English, were ordered to register as nonprofit organizations or cease operation (D. Morgan, 2022). Consequently, the number of these institutions decreased by 92% (Feng, 2022). Moreover, the newly registered nonprofit training institutions were forbidden from scheduling lessons for K-9 students on weekends and during school holidays, the only times available to most children (The Economist, 2021). Consequently, English learning opportunities for school-aged children in China became severely limited.

CIS remain under strict government supervision as institutions serving domestic students (Wright et al., 2022). Practices such as flag-raising ceremonies, singing the Chinese national anthem, and avoiding sensitive topics in the classroom are thus present in internationalized schools to the same extent as in other Chinese schools (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Poole et al., 2022). Furthermore, foreign textbooks are forbidden in all elementary and junior high schools (Poole et al., 2022; World Education Services, 2022). Recently, the government introduced a 5% cap on the market share of nonpublic schools in the educational system, and private elementary and junior high schools were required to join the same lottery system for admission as public schools (Bunnell, 2022; Bunnell & Poole, 2022). As the scale of global education widens and more international school options detract Chinese families from domestic schools and Confucian values, the government becomes increasingly critical of the industry, and further attempts to curtail its growth can be predicted (De Silva et al., 2020; Poole et al., 2022).

Expatriate Teachers

As global mobility increases worldwide, expatriation has become a lifestyle choice on a path to self-fulfillment for many (Jiang et al., 2022; Murdock, 2022). The following sections

situate ETs working in CIS in the broader context of expatriation in China. First, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) are defined and contrasted with assigned expatriates (AEs). Then, expatriate typologies are discussed. General information about expatriates in China is provided to demonstrate the place of teachers among other professional groups. Finally, a synthesis of the common themes related to expatriate educators in CIS shows this group's privileged yet precarious status.

Self-Initiated Expatriates

International teachers belong to the category of SIEs. SIEs are professionals who temporarily live and work in countries other than their passport countries and who decide to seek employment abroad on their own, without institutional support (Andresen & Muskat, 2021; Brewster et al., 2021; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Murdock, 2022). In contrast, AEs are skilled professionals and managerial staff dispatched abroad by their companies for predetermined contract lengths who receive organizational support and acculturation training (Holtbrügge, 2021; Presbitero, 2021). SIEs form a highly heterogeneous group of employees. Compared to AEs, SIEs tend to be younger, occupy lower-ranking positions, and show a more balanced male-to-female ratio than the male-dominated AE group (Wechtler et al., 2023).

The concept of *cultural distance*, defined as “the (dis)similarity of values between people of different national cultures,” helps to understand SIEs' cultural adaptation, decisions to relocate, and the changes in expatriate behavior over time (Andresen & Muskat, 2021, p. 56). Unlike AEs, SIEs rarely receive acculturation training and must shoulder the entire burden of adaptation. Andresen and Muskat (2021) reported that various expatriate groups experienced cultural distance and adaptation differently. Specifically, the cultural distance could be a pull

factor for some expatriates but a push factor for others. The theory of cultural tightness-looseness distinguishes between environments with tight cultures, where rules are strict and rule-breaking is sanctioned, and those with loose cultures, where laws are arbitrary and remain unenforced (Gelfand et al., 2006). Relocating from a tight-culture setting to a loose-culture setting poses fewer cultural adaptation challenges for SIEs than moving from a loose culture to a tight culture (Andresen & Muskat, 2021).

The motivations to work abroad may include financial incentives, paucity of domestic employment opportunities, a desire to experience an adventure and see the world, or a search for the inner self away from home country pressure (Holtbrügge, 2021; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Poole, 2020b). SIEs are independent and proactive in their career choices and follow personal goals and motivations; therefore, their recruitment, management, and retention remain challenging for host country companies (Wechtler et al., 2023). Although the stereotype of an expatriate, particularly one of Western origin, includes connotations of privilege and high status, SIEs can also be low-status, menial, or manual workers who escape the poverty and unemployment of their home countries (Andresen & Muskat, 2021; Cai & Su, 2021; Holtbrügge, 2021; C. H. Williams, 2017). Because scholarly interest in SIEs only gained momentum in the new millennium, many lower-status expatriate groups, among them teachers, remain under-researched (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Brewster et al., 2021; Hollett et al., 2021; Holtbrügge, 2021; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2022; Koh & Sin, 2020; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020b; Yang et al., 2018).

SIEs show relatively low organizational longevity, commitment, and loyalty because they perceive constant mobility as beneficial to their careers (Wechtler et al., 2023). They tend to feel less secure in their positions than AEs and might feel distrust toward their employers. However, they usually avoid open conflict because their lives abroad entirely depend on the income

generated by their jobs (Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020b). Companies hiring staff from abroad are often aware of SIEs' characteristics and their precarious positions (Poole & Bunnell, 2021; Rey et al., 2020). Employers tend to view SIEs as unpredictable outsiders and treat them with a degree of suspicion that leads to scarce professional development opportunities, a lower rank within company hierarchies, and sometimes lower salaries (Wechtler et al., 2023).

Expatriate Typologies

Expatriates are a highly diverse group of employees. Among many attempts at classifying SIEs, two deserve attention for this discussion because they distinguish specific employee profiles in samples taken from educational settings. In their study of British academic SIEs, J. Richardson and McKenna (2002) identified four distinct groups based on expatriates' motivations to work abroad. Explorers were motivated by adventure, eager to see the world, and willing to experience different cultures. Refugees, in contrast, wanted to escape the hardships of life back home and expected an easier life abroad. Architects were determined to enrich their resumes and gain work experience that could later give them a competitive edge in domestic and global labor markets. Lastly, mercenaries became expatriates for financial reasons, as working overseas allowed them to accumulate savings and afford a better lifestyle.

In another attempt at a typology of SIEs, Wechtler et al. (2023) distinguished four groups of SIEs based on their employment relationships and demographic features. Early-stage careerists were usually young, single, and career-oriented, and although they had high expectations of their employers, they were also willing to put considerable effort into their work. Professional cosmopolitans, on the other hand, were more experienced and better adjusted to expatriate life. They tended to hold low expectations of their employers but showed high dedication to their jobs. Lost-in-transition escapees lacked prior experience and struggled with

expatriate adjustment, avoided long-term commitments, and usually demonstrated low job satisfaction. Finally, dependent travelers, the most common group of SIEs, were often disengaged and frustrated with their employers.

Expatriates in China

The value of expatriates in China has become exceptionally high since 2013, when China's President Xi Jinping introduced the Belt and Road Initiative aimed at cross-border cooperation between China and other countries (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021). The initiative opened the Chinese market to foreign expertise that expatriates could fill well. However, with the influx of skilled professionals from abroad, the perceptions of foreigners in Chinese companies changed. Although local employees can benefit from working alongside expatriates for skill building and cultural sensitivity, the arrival of outside talent might cause dissatisfaction with unequal treatment and the loss of the most desired jobs to foreigners (Mok & Chan, 2020; see also Dos Santos, 2020).

The only current large-scale data about the number of foreign nationals residing in China can be found in the *China Population Census Yearbook 2020* (Guowuyuan Diqiciquanguorenkoupuocha Lingdao Xiaozu Bangongshi [GDLB], 2022), which presents the results of the population census conducted between November and December 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as soon as the global pandemic started, many expatriates left Asia to return to their home countries (Hoang, 2020). Because of strict border restrictions, the influx of foreign talent to China was severely limited until spring 2023. Thus, the presented numbers can only serve as approximations and are likely to change drastically in the coming years.

Nearly half of the 1,430,695 nonlocal residents in Mainland China in 2020 held passports issued by the neighboring countries (Myanmar, Vietnam, South Korea), Chinese Taiwan, and the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao (GDLB, 2022). The census data listed 55,226 Americans, 21,309 Canadians, 12,777 Australians, and 12,513 British citizens residing in China in 2020. Of all the nonlocal residents, only a third declared employment as their purpose of stay. It remains unclear how many among the employed were SIEs, AEs, and low-skilled migrant workers. Compared to the 2010 census data, the number of nonlocal residents in China increased by 40% despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the recent data (GDLB, 2022; Guojiatongjiju Renkou He Jiuye Tongjisi & Guowuyuan Renkoupuocha Bangongshi [GRHJT & GRB], 2012). However, most of this increase can be attributed to the influx of Myanmar citizens, whose numbers in China grew ninefold within the last decade. At the same time, the number of American nationals decreased by 30%.

Interestingly, the number of nonlocal residents staying in China for over five years more than doubled within the last decade (GDLB, 2022; GRHJT & GRB, 2012). Moreover, the ratio of male to female expatriates increased from 3:2 in 2010 to nearly 1:1 in 2020. These findings confirm the changing trends in personnel movement worldwide. As global mobility gains popularity, self-initiated expatriation increasingly becomes a lifestyle choice for both men and women on their paths to self-fulfillment (Jiang et al., 2022).

China as a Challenging Destination

Chinese people tend to distinguish between locals and outsiders based on physical appearance and bloodlines and often treat all foreigners as a homogenous group of others (Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Therefore, many expatriates in China feel barriers to integration resulting solely from their foreign appearance (Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020). Expatriates in China might show

interest in local culture and language, but relationships with host country nationals are often characterized by misunderstandings and cultural differences (Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Foreigners' cultural blunders may lead to tensions with host country nationals (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021). Even with high Mandarin proficiency, a long sojourn in China, and a good understanding of the local culture, an expatriate might remain an outsider in the minds of the locals (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021). Y. Liu and Self (2020) observed that the perceptions of foreigners often rely on the locals' beliefs in the moral superiority of the Chinese and the negative stereotypes of Westerners derived from Hollywood movies, foreign media, and Chinese history. Western expatriates in China might thus be seen as "culturally incompetent, sexually promiscuous, and misbehaved" (Y. Liu & Self, 2020, p. 476).

Interpersonal relationships alleviate alienation, marginalization, and nostalgia experienced by expatriates in China (Cai & Su, 2021). Friendships with local people can be invaluable, particularly in the early stages of cultural adaptation (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021). Some individuals form numerous relationships with the locals, while others rely on friendships with other foreigners (Cai & Su, 2021). Expatriates generally prefer to socialize within the international community, and their contact with host country nationals tends to be limited (E. Cohen, 1977; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Murdock, 2022; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020; Reade & McKenna, 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). However, it must be noted that sticking to one's own is not unique to expatriates. People generally show a preference and higher regard for individuals similar to them in terms of ethnicity and race (Koppelman, 2020; Schaefer, 2019).

Another challenge of being an expatriate in China pertains to obtaining a visa. In the *Expat Insider 2023: The World Through Expat Eyes* survey, China ranked 44th among 53 countries in the ease of obtaining a visa (InterNations, 2023). This difficulty might result from

the fact that the current work permit system prioritizes top-talent applicants (Cai & Su, 2021). Foreign workers in China are assigned one of three work permit categories: A for high-end foreign talent, B for foreign professional talent, and C for other foreigners (Shanghai Municipal People's Government [SMPG], 2020). Category A applicants are highly desired and enjoy preferential application treatment, but category B work permit holders, among them most international teachers, constitute the largest group within the Chinese expatriate talent pool (Cai & Su, 2021). The number of category C applicants is strictly controlled, and this group receives the least preferential treatment, including short-term work permits (SMPG, 2020). Many expatriates stay in China for up to five years and then move to another location, as obtaining Chinese permanent residence remains extremely difficult (Cai & Su, 2021).

Expatriate Teachers in Chinese International Schools

As previously stated, Type C nontraditional international schools, known in the Chinese context as CIS, differ greatly from Type A traditional international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). They are profit-driven and mainly cater to students from local middle-class families (Bunnell, 2019a; Bunnell et al., 2016; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; M. Lee et al., 2022; Ying & Wright, 2023). While most teachers in Type A international schools come from Anglo-Saxon countries and hold teaching licenses, CIS hire a mix of LTs and ETs of different nationalities and backgrounds (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Poole, 2020b). Nevertheless, discriminatory practices are common as recruitment in the international school industry tends to lean toward candidates of certain nationalities (Beek, 2023).

The minimum requirements for teachers to obtain a Chinese work permit include a bachelor's degree and two years of previous teaching experience (Poole et al., 2022; SMPG, 2020). English language teachers should be native English speakers and hold passports issued by

one of the English-speaking countries. However, in some provinces, this criterion is extended to foreigners of any nationality who majored in English or education (e.g., Yunnan Province Science and Technology Department, 2022). Additionally, English teachers need to prove one of three conditions: two years of previous English teaching experience, a degree in education, or the completion of an international language teaching certificate (SMPG, 2020). Interestingly, teachers of subjects other than English do not need to be native English speakers and are not required to prove their English proficiency but should have two years of subject-teaching experience.

Poole (2022) cautioned against typologizing international educators and called reducing this group of teachers to preset categories “a form of symbolic tyranny” (pp. 1158-1159). Although typologies objectify teachers, show a deterministic view of teacher identity, and cannot capture the nuances of educators’ lived experiences, they can help understand some of the teachers’ motivations. Among several typologies proposed over the last two decades, one offered by Bailey and Cooker (2019) deserves a brief mention because it can be applied to ETs working in CIS and captures the motivations to work in these institutions (Poole, 2020c). Bailey and Cooker’s (2019) terminology echoes the previously mentioned types of international schools identified by Hayden and Thompson (2013): Type A traditional, Type B ideological, and Type C internationalized.

Bailey and Cooker (2019) distinguished three categories of ETs. Type A educators use teaching to pay for travel and global mobility, while Type B teachers perceive their jobs as a mission and a chance to initiate change in students’ lives. In contrast, Type C teachers view their careers as a way to stay in their host countries for family or convenience reasons. The authors

observed that the three types did not remain constant, and some individuals moved from one type to another as their experiences of expatriation evolved.

The assets ETs bring to their jobs in China include their foreign ethnicity and appearance, English proficiency, and experience in different lines of work in their home countries and abroad, but not always overseas teaching credentials and teaching experience (Poole, 2020c; Poole et al., 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023). The unsatiated demand for ETs in China might lead to hiring candidates for their appearance and marketability rather than teaching expertise (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Dos Santos, 2022). Many ETs in China are thus accidental teachers because they were drawn to the profession by chance rather than a conscious choice (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell & Poole, 2022). Working in CIS can offer some of them an easy path to a high salary without much effort or responsibility.

Many ETs become third-culture teachers (Bailey & Cooker, 2019). Because they did not receive pedagogical qualifications in their home countries, they do not see themselves as part of the school systems in these countries. However, as their professional identities developed entirely in international schools, these individuals do not associate with the mainstream teaching profession in their host countries either (Poole, 2020b, 2020c; Tarc et al., 2019). Third-culture teachers might not be able or willing to extend their experience to other educational contexts because of feelings of inadequacy and self-perceptions of being fake teachers (Bailey & Cooker, 2019). Their employment and professional mobility are thus limited to the international school sector (Poole, 2020c, 2022).

The Challenges of Working in Chinese Internationalized Schools

The faculties in CIS include LTs on domestic contracts who teach in Mandarin and fulfill most of the administrative duties. On the other hand, the schools employ ETs who contribute to

the international school image but might be marginalized, undervalued, and reduced to school mascots (Everitt, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020a, 2020c). ETs are necessary for the fragile social legitimacy typical of private schools, but their professional expertise might not match the context of CIS (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Erichsen & Waldow, 2020; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). Moreover, neither ETs nor LTs are prepared for the demanding setting of mixed-hire schools (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Kostogriz et al., 2022). Because the two teacher groups receive unequal treatment, faculty divisions and toxic work environments are common (Poole, 2020a).

Kostogriz et al. (2022) reported a “complex racial, linguistic, pedagogical, and relational geometry of power” determining the institutional climate in mixed-hire schools (p. 251). The unequal treatment of the two teacher groups and the resulting feelings of envy and resentment create barriers to faculty integration and collaboration (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; C. H. Williams, 2017). Disparities in status and working conditions might lead to minimal contact between local and international staff, faculty division into subgroups and enclaves, and toxic work environments (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole, 2021). The duality of pedagogical approaches in CIS, for example, LTs’ overreliance on Mandarin in English teaching and ETs’ use of Western teaching methods that might be unfamiliar to local learners, often lead to students’ confusion and demotivation (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; C. H. Williams, 2017). Moreover, the clash of orientations and beliefs about teaching and learning can diminish the institutional integrity of CIS (Poole, 2020b).

Compared to LTs, ETs receive higher salaries and tend to have better living conditions (Poole, 2020b). For example, ETs might live in spatial, company-sponsored apartments while the

LTs share small dorm rooms with their coworkers. ETs might also enjoy higher status, have fewer professional responsibilities, and be able better balance their work and private lives (Kostogriz et al., 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). ETs can afford a lifestyle that enables them to stay in an “expat bubble” (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). LTs, in contrast, generally have more administrative and support duties and spend more time at work (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019), although they might teach fewer classes than ETs (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; see also T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Murdock, 2022). Because many ETs are not proficient in Mandarin, LTs may have to regularly serve as translators and mediators between the ETs, the parents, and the students.

ETs might be excluded from their schools’ main communication channels and decision making due to their lack of Mandarin proficiency (Poole, 2020b). Organizational limitations resulting from the for-profit nature of CIS, insufficient communication with the leadership and LTs, unethical management practices, exploitation, and a lack of collegiality can increase ET dissatisfaction (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). Indeed, the high turnover and attrition rates of ETs remain one of the biggest challenges for managing CIS (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Stroud Stasel, 2022). However, for ETs who remain loyal to their places of employment, the turnover of other staff members can lead to increased status and a quick promotion (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Stroud Stasel, 2022).

Although ETs appreciate the respect educators enjoy in Chinese society and the value local parents attach to education, they often struggle with the exam culture that imparts a focus on standardized tests from an early age and demands teaching students to pass a test rather than think critically (Soong & Stahl, 2023). Because most ETs were educated in Western mainstream schools, they may misunderstand Chinese education and perceive local teaching methods as

inferior (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Woods & Kong, 2020). Overseas educators might experience a lack of student motivation if they teach subjects unrelated to standardized tests (Poole et al., 2022). Working with learners below the expected English proficiency or with poor educational foundations might lead to classroom discipline problems, ineffective instruction, and the exclusion of student-centered methods. Furthermore, ETs in China often complain about the repressive school culture that supports student passivity, the cumbersome mixture of local and international curricula, the outdated and ineffective teaching methods, the overuse of Mandarin and translation in English teaching, and the long hours local students must spend at school (Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole, 2020c; Poole et al., 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023).

Privilege and Precarity

Kostogriz et al. (2022) observed that vulnerability is universally embedded in the teaching profession in the current era of educational commercialization. The situation of ETs in China is both privileged and precarious (Bunnell, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022). ETs enjoy relatively high status because they are necessary for the institutional legitimacy of their schools, but they are rarely valued for their expertise and cultural capital (Bunnell & Poole, 2022, 2023; Poole, 2020b, 2020c). The hypervisibility of ETs in CIS enhances the schools' international image but is coupled with invisibility in school management and organizational decision making (Bunnell & Poole, 2022). Therefore, many ETs see their work in CIS merely as a first step in the hierarchy of teaching jobs.

Regrettably, the marginalization of foreign educators in Chinese schools often leads to their hindered professional growth and downward mobility (Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Soong & Stahl, 2023). Consequently, the teaching experience acquired in CIS alone may not suffice to

secure employment in traditional international schools or any schools outside China (Bailey & Cooker, 2019). ETs are called an educational precariat because their position involves a lack of stability and social security (Bunnell, 2016; Poole, 2020b). The increasing market regulation and unpredictability of the international school sector in China lead to employment uncertainty (De Silva et al., 2020; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Poole et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2022). It could be argued that international educators choose to trade job stability for independence, mobility, and challenge (Hollett et al., 2021).

The labor contracts in CIS can be described as sticky because they attract candidates with high salaries and competitive benefits such as a monthly housing allowance, yearly air ticket reimbursement for flights back home, or high-end commercial medical insurance (Bunnell & Poole, 2022). At the same time, the contracts are slippery due to the reported difficulty of quitting an expatriate teaching job (Chou, 2021). On the one hand, labor relationships are codified in written contracts. On the other hand, they involve *psychological contracts*, that is, beliefs implied by employers regarding the factual terms of employment (Rousseau, 1995). Consequently, expectations about an expatriate job often result not only from the conditions codified in the labor contract but also from the informal arrangements that form the psychological contracts (Haak-Saheem et al., 2023).

ETs often feel marginalized because their local coworkers and supervisors treat them as outsiders and temporary hires without much understanding of the Chinese reality (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Poole, 2020c). The feelings of marginalization lead to perceptions of being undervalued (Poole et al., 2022). Compared with the LTs, ETs receive little trust, responsibility, and training. The precarity of their positions is enhanced by numerous factors: an unstable political climate, changing visa requirements, and limited access to state provisions; absence of

legal protection, unfair hiring and compensation practices, unregulated worktime, and short-term employment contracts; exclusionary organizational practices, destructive management, and frequent leadership turnover; and the expectation to serve as school mascots and magnets for student recruitment (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole, 2020b, 2022; Poole et al., 2022; see also T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017).

The Job Satisfaction of Expatriate Teachers

TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) posits that employees who feel dissatisfied with their jobs or work environments initiate work adjustment. However, international schools worldwide suffer from severe teacher shortages and rarely can afford to screen potential candidates for institutional fit (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Murdock, 2022; Stroud Stasel, 2022). Considering the causes of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of ETs can aid an understanding of the preconditions for work adjustment. Although studies of job satisfaction in international schools are rare, some clear trends can be observed in the recent literature (Dos Santos, 2019; Fong, 2018; Murdock, 2022).

The Significance of Job Satisfaction

Satisfied educators display instructional effectiveness, positively impact student performance, and contribute to student well-being (Benevene et al., 2018; Demir, 2020; Ouellette et al., 2018; Parveen & Bano, 2019). They enjoy good mental and physical health, promote positive school climates, and support the organizational growth of their schools (Pepe et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Toropova et al., 2021). Moreover, educators with high job satisfaction show lower absenteeism, turnover intentions, and attrition (Edinger & Edinger, 2018; García Torres, 2019; Lavy & Eshet, 2018; Shim et al., 2022). In contrast, employing unsatisfied

teachers has negative consequences for schools, including disruptions in instructional processes, diminished faculty collegiality, and loss of institutional expertise (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Toropova et al., 2021).

Only 82% of international school teachers are satisfied with their jobs (Wigford & Higgins, 2019), compared to over 90% of national teachers (Gonzales et al., 2020; Kasalak & Dağyar, 2020; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Moreover, 42% of international teachers feel frustrated at work at least half the time (Wigford & Higgins, 2019). Although ETs are generally satisfied with their salaries and benefits (Murdock, 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019), a constant search for better employment packages is common in the industry and encouraged by recruitment agencies (Ihejieta, 2020). ETs accept a high salary as a natural part of working abroad and do not necessarily perceive it as a strong motivator or retention factor (Dos Santos, 2019; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017). Nonfinancial rewards, such as recognition and professional development opportunities, are as important for ETs as for national teachers (Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017).

Antecedents of Job Dissatisfaction

Poor school leadership constitutes the strongest source of dissatisfaction for ETs (Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; Wigford & Higgins, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). Autocratic management, unequal treatment, rule ambiguity, and a lack of direction frequently lead to ETs' perceptions of disorganized and dysfunctional work environments (Dos Santos, 2019, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Murdock, 2022). ETs complain about constant change and a lack of planning and consistency in their schools (Everitt, 2020; Murdock, 2022). Moreover, language and cultural barriers often encumber communication with the management and the LTs, leaving

ETs uninformed and uninvolved (Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Wigford & Higgins, 2019).

ETs are greatly affected by their relationships with coworkers and students. Therefore, hindered communication with LTs often leads to disappointments and frustration (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). Consequently, ETs might feel marginalized and undervalued (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Everitt, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Murdock, 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). On the other hand, student progress and classroom synergy constitute a source of job satisfaction, but poor discipline, disrespectful attitudes, and low student engagement lead to dissatisfaction (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019).

ETs usually spend less time at schools than LTs but tend to teach more classes (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Murdock, 2022). However, the impact of workloads on the job satisfaction of ETs varies by context. Although some individuals do not mind their heavy workloads (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017), many feel overwhelmed and suffer under the time pressure of their jobs (Everitt, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). Unsurprisingly, ETs perceive workplace stress as a negative influence on their job satisfaction (Hollett et al., 2021). Workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction can also be predicted by ETs' personality features, such as impulsivity and neuroticism, and by positive characteristics, such as empathy, agreeableness, and innovativeness (Hollett et al., 2021). People-oriented and creative individuals might display low job satisfaction and frequently change jobs, but "teachers with low emotional awareness persist in their positions" (Hollett et al., 2021, p. 17). Other personal factors, such as conscientiousness, extraversion, honesty-humility, and resilience, showed no correlations with job satisfaction.

Although location is an important consideration when choosing to move abroad, it remains unclear whether it is related to the job satisfaction of ETs (Dos Santos, 2019; Murdock, 2022). Some evidence suggests that location is insignificant as ETs mainly consider organizational factors when reflecting on their jobs (Fong, 2018; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017). However, Dos Santos (2020) reported numerous examples of discrimination against Black expatriates in the South Korean education industry that affected the job satisfaction and mental health of the study participants, leading to their departure from the country. Furthermore, Ihejieta (2020) identified several location-specific factors hindering the job satisfaction and retention of ETs in China: internet censorship, textbook and course content restrictions, the absence of trade unions, high income tax, culture shock, and language barriers. China remains a popular expatriate destination, but its challenging work culture and severe internet censorship make it an extremely demanding setting for the international workforce (InterNations, 2023; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023).

Expatriate Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment describes the degree of psychological comfort with a foreign country's living and work environment (Harari et al., 2018; Setti et al., 2022; van der Laken et al., 2019). Black et al. (1991) proposed a cross-cultural adjustment model that distinguishes work, interaction, and general adjustment. *General adjustment* captures the comfort level with daily life in the host country and includes aspects such as familiarity with food, weather, or transportation (Harari et al., 2018). *Interaction adjustment* refers to the comfort in dealing with host country nationals (Black et al., 1991). Lastly, *work adjustment* involves understanding professional obligations and mastering job tasks (Yow et al., 2022).

The cost of unadjusted expatriates can be severe for the companies hiring them and the individuals themselves. Expatriate work adjustment influences job performance (Akhal & Liu, 2019; X. Chen et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021; Davies et al., 2019; Setti et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2020), entrepreneurship (Wang et al., 2019), and organizational citizenship behavior (Singh et al., 2022). Well-adjusted expatriates show higher job satisfaction (Biswas et al., 2022), lower work stress (M. Chen, 2019), and enhanced well-being (Biswas et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021). In contrast, low work adjustment is connected to heightened turnover intentions (Akhal & Liu, 2019; X. Chen et al., 2022; Chew et al., 2021; Davies et al., 2019; Harari et al., 2018). In teachers, poor adjustment can lead to elevated stress levels and other mental health problems but also lowered teaching quality (Roskell, 2013; Stroud Stasel, 2022).

Expatriate adjustment is a well-researched topic (Brewster et al., 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020; Reade & McKenna, 2022). It attracts scholarly interest because employment experiences in another country involve numerous challenges (Akhal & Liu, 2019; Davies et al., 2019; Y. Han et al., 2022; Harari et al., 2018; Stroud Stasel, 2022; Tsegaye et al., 2019). Although adjustment has been one of the most researched aspects of expatriation, most studies focus on general expatriate groups (Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020; Guo et al., 2021; Wilkins & Neri, 2019). The work adjustment of specific occupational groups remains understudied (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). Despite the growing number of international schools worldwide, very little is known about the adjustment of the teachers employed in these institutions (Koh & Sin, 2020). It is surprising because scholarly interest in expatriate academics, that is, teaching and research faculty at overseas universities, has been vigorous (Ngonyama-Ndou, 2020; Schartner et al., 2023; Wilkins & Annabi, 2023). Before the limited findings of the few current studies exploring

the work adjustment of ETs are presented, it is necessary to consider the results of recent research into the work adjustment of general expatriate groups and expatriate academics.

Organizational Antecedents of Expatriate Work Adjustment

Individuals who understand their work tasks and employer requirements adjust more easily than those uncertain of what is expected of them (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022). In a seminal study of expatriates in Japan, Black (1988) found that role ambiguity, that is, the absence of clear work expectations, showed a moderate negative effect on work adjustment. Moreover, perceived organizational support significantly influences expatriates' professional functioning, and role clarity greatly impacts work adjustment (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). Although tenure in an organization does not influence expatriate work adjustment, organizational culture does (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021).

Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al. (2022) considered four types of organizations: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy. *Clan culture* creates a family-like organizational climate where employees work together and support each other. In contrast, *market culture* facilitates competition, efficiency, and achievement, while *adhocracy* focuses on creativity, growth, and employee autonomy. Lastly, a *hierarchy work culture* relies on conformity and formalized company structures. Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al.'s study demonstrated that only the clan organizational culture supported expatriate work adjustment.

Expatriate academics mention many specific influences on their work adjustment: professional development (Harry et al., 2019; Wilkins & Annabi, 2023), the availability of research opportunities (Schartner et al., 2023; Wilkins & Neri, 2019), support from expatriate coworkers (Schartner et al., 2023), and organizational embeddedness in the host country

institution (Ngonyama-Ndou, 2020). The expectations brought from home-country teaching settings rarely translate into host-country classroom dynamics, especially in developing nations (Wilkins & Neri, 2019). Thus, expatriate academics must adapt to different lesson participation patterns, utilize different teaching strategies, and challenge their expectations of student abilities (Asif et al., 2020; Burford et al., 2020; Lamers-Reeuwijk et al., 2020; Wilkins & Neri, 2019). Other adjustment barriers reported by expatriate academics include authoritative management (Wilkins & Annabi, 2023), excessive bureaucracy (Schartner et al., 2023), feeling devaluated and excluded from decision making (Harry et al., 2019), and conflicting demands from the home and host country campuses (Wilkins & Neri, 2019).

Non-Organizational Antecedents of Expatriate Work Adjustment

Demographic variables, such as age, gender, level of education, marital status, and length of stay in the host country generally show no significant influence on expatriate work adjustment (Akhil & Liu, 2019; Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Setti et al., 2022). However, Yu and Ren (2021) theorized that gender-work role identity conflicts might lead to work maladjustment of female expatriates, especially in male-centric organizational and national cultures. While individuals with previous work experience adapt better to their expatriate jobs than career starters (Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020), work experience abroad only constitutes a minor influence (Akhil & Liu, 2019; Schlaegel et al., 2021).

Host language proficiency represents an important adjustment factor for expatriates. Being unable to communicate in the local language might lead expatriates to only socialize with other foreigners and avoid local coworkers (Davies et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2021; Harry et al., 2019; C. Richardson, 2022). Moreover, familiarity with the host language matters for expatriate academics, particularly in contexts where English skills are low among the host country

population (Asif et al., 2020). The lack of language proficiency has been identified as an obstacle to work adjustment and a barrier to forming relationships with local coworkers and students (Asif et al., 2020; Harry et al., 2019; Schartner et al., 2023).

A unique combination of individual personality traits can make a difference in work adjustment abroad. The five-factor personality model (McCrae & Costa, 1987) distinguished the traits of agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness to experience, and extraversion. Although a relationship between these traits and expatriate work adjustment has been proven in numerous studies, the impact of the five personality features on adjustment varies between studies and remains small to medium (Y. Han et al., 2022; Harari et al., 2018; Schlaegel et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). Thus, no conclusions can be drawn about which of the traits impact expatriate work adjustment the most.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is another frequently examined influence on expatriate work adjustment (Akhil & Liu, 2019; Chew et al., 2021; Y. Han et al., 2022; Schlaegel et al., 2021; Setti et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019; Yow et al., 2022). CQ can be defined as a person's ability to adapt effectively to new cultural settings and consists of four dimensions: cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003; Ren et al., 2021). *Cognitive CQ* means the explicit knowledge of foreign norms, practices, and customs, while *metacognitive CQ* captures the level of cultural awareness (Setti et al., 2022). The willingness to learn in cross-cultural situations is described as *motivational CQ* (Schlaegel et al., 2021). On the other hand, *behavioral CQ* defines the ability to act in culturally sensitive ways (Ren et al., 2021). It seems natural that individuals with high cultural intelligence adapt more easily to their new work conditions. Indeed, numerous studies have confirmed the link between different aspects of cultural intelligence and expatriate work adjustment, with an effect size ranging from

small (Akhil & Liu, 2019; Ren et al., 2021; Setti et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019) to medium (Y. Han et al., 2022; Schlaegel et al., 2021; Yow et al., 2022). Moreover, Y. Han et al. (2022) observed the impact of two intercultural traits on expatriate work adjustment: a large effect of cultural sensitivity and a small effect of cultural flexibility.

Emotional intelligence describes an individual's cognitive ability to use emotions in handling new contexts (Y. Han et al., 2022). It involves self-awareness and interpersonal skills necessary for effective work adjustment (Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020). Expatriates with high emotional intelligence adapt more easily and perform better in their host country companies (Chew et al., 2021). The impact of emotional intelligence on expatriate work adjustment was reported as medium (Arokiasamy & Kim, 2020) to large (Chew et al., 2021; Y. Han et al., 2022; Schlaegel et al., 2021). Moreover, Chew et al. (2021) demonstrated a large effect of political intelligence, or the ability to enhance an individual's personal and organizational goals, on expatriate work adjustment.

The Work Adjustment of Expatriate Teachers

ETs remain an understudied group of globally mobile employees (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Koh & Sin, 2020; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020b; Stroud Stasel, 2022). The first studies of ET work adjustment were published in the early years of the new millennium and showed limited findings (see Chapter 1, Historical Context). Moreover, research into the adjustment of ETs has not always targeted the work facet of the phenomenon and has often presented adjustment as an accidental outcome of other variables or brief mentions in accounts of general expatriation experiences. The few recent studies addressing the work adjustment of ETs that could be located included participants employed in international schools (Sachdej, 2018; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022; Templer, 2020), national schools (Ren et al., 2021), and after-school training

institutions (Fernández-Álvarez et al., 2022; Ye & Edwards, 2017). However, none of the studies explored the work adjustment of ETs employed in CIS.

Templer (2020) investigated the relationship between expatriate adjustment and self-enhancement, that is, a tendency to perceive oneself in an unrealistically positive way compared to others. The sample included 100 expatriates in Singapore, 59 among them ETs employed in international schools, and their supervisors. The author found that self-enhancement was not related to self-perceived expatriate adjustment but was negatively linked to supervisor-rated work adjustment. It could be concluded that self-enhancing expatriates do not realize their maladjustment because of their inflated self-confidence. Moreover, self-rated general adjustment and supervisor-rated work adjustment showed a relationship with intercultural knowledge, while tenure in the host country only had a small effect on work adjustment.

Ren et al. (2021) examined the antecedents of expatriate thriving and retention in a sample of international teachers. The authors surveyed 103 ETs of various nationalities employed in American K-12 schools as a part of a teaching abroad program. The three facets of expatriate adjustment, general, interaction, and work adjustment, served as control variables (Black et al., 1991). The authors observed a small effect of cultural intelligence and expatriate thriving on work adjustment and a weak but statistically significant relationship between ET work adjustment and retention.

While the West-goes-East perspective is common in expatriate studies, the migration of Asian expatriates to other parts of the world receives much less attention (He et al., 2019; Okpara et al., 2021). In a study centered on Mandarin teachers, Fernández-Álvarez et al. (2022) explored the experiences of 21 Chinese expatriate educators teaching in Confucius Institutes in Spain. The authors aimed to identify the perspectives, challenges, and adjustments in a foreign living and

work environment. Three themes related to the work adjustment of Chinese teachers became apparent: the differences in instructional philosophies and practices, the scarcity of suitable teaching resources, and the unpreparedness for diversity and special educational needs. These results mostly confirmed the findings of an earlier study of Mandarin teachers working in the UK (Ye & Edwards, 2017).

Another study of educator acculturation in international schools was presented in two journal articles by Stroud Stasel (2021, 2022). The sample consisted of 17 licensed teachers and educational leaders from Canada, the US, and the UK who worked in traditional international schools in Asia. The author concluded that while ETs face serious work adjustment problems, the experience of working overseas also brings numerous benefits to the participants (Stroud Stasel, 2022). These gains might include increased cultural competence, professional growth, preparation to support the adjustment of sojourning students, and opportunities for leadership roles. Moreover, the author emphasized the role of teacher training institutions in preparing educators for international assignments and proposed an educator acculturation framework (Stroud Stasel, 2021; see also Beek, 2023).

In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, two recent doctoral dissertations included findings on the work adjustment of ETs. Sachdej (2018) investigated the adjustment factors leading to job retention in a sample of 400 beginner teachers in Thai international schools. The author found curriculum and instruction, guidance and support of educational practices, and perceived organizational support to be crucial for successful work adjustment. Moreover, a doctoral dissertation by Anning (2020) proved the potential benefits of onboarding programs for the work adjustment of ETs.

Research into the work adjustment of ETs remains scarce and fragmentary (El Baroudi & Khapova, 2021; Harry et al., 2019; Koh & Sin, 2020; Stroud Stasel, 2022; Templer, 2020). Therefore, identifying the themes recurring in the data is challenging. The available findings generally show the necessity for expatriate educators to adapt their instructional strategies and educational philosophies (Fernández-Álvarez et al., 2022; Sachdej, 2018; Ye & Edwards, 2017) and the need for more guidance and support for ETs (Sachdej, 2018). Onboarding and teacher training appear to play a role in successful preparation for work with international students (Anning, 2020; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022; see also Beek, 2023).

Gap in the Literature

Despite the breadth of research on expatriate work adjustment, several gaps exist in the literature. Sampling expatriates remains challenging, and many authors note the low response rates in large-scale expatriate studies (Akhil & Liu, 2019; Fong, 2018; Hollett et al., 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). Most studies focus on general expatriate samples, while specific occupational groups still receive insufficient attention (Guo et al., 2021; Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022). Scholarly interest in the adjustment of expatriate academics is growing, but ETs remain underrepresented despite the growing number of international schools worldwide (El Baroudi & Khapova, 2021; Harry et al., 2019; Koh & Sin, 2020; Stroud Stasel, 2022; Templer, 2020).

Experts call for more studies with expatriates of different origins residing in specific host countries to supplement the prevalent mixed international samples of expatriates that lack contextual embeddedness (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; W. Richardson et al., 2006; Templer, 2020). Furthermore, the perspective on work adjustment has long embraced a stressor-strain orientation based on reactivity, ignoring proactivity in expatriate adjustment as

posited by TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020). Lastly, China, a growing economy and an important expatriation and international education market, receives too little attention in migration studies (Akhal & Liu, 2019; M. Chen, 2019; Wahid & Tanius, 2022).

Summary

The theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) can serve as a framework to explore the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. Expatriate teachers have historically catered to children of globally mobile employees, but in the last two decades, the international school industry in developing countries has increasingly embraced students from local middle-class families (Bunnell, 2022; Kim, 2019; Kostogriz et al., 2022). The expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools allow local students to experience international education but face many adjustment challenges due to China's work culture and the difficult working conditions in internationalized schools (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Soong & Stahl, 2023). Although the adjustment of general expatriate populations is a well-researched phenomenon linked to numerous organizational and non-organizational factors, a gap exists in the literature concerning the work adjustment of expatriate teachers (Stroud Stasel, 2022; Templer, 2020). Moreover, the current literature supports the need to explain how overseas educators experience work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools. Understanding how expatriate teachers adjust at the workplace can narrow a gap in the literature, extend the applications of the theory of work adjustment, impact the recruitment, management, and retention of international educators in Chinese internationalized schools, and improve these institutions' instructional quality and sustainability.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. First, the research design is explained and justified, the research questions are listed, Chinese internationalized schools are portrayed as the setting of the study, and expatriate teachers are described as the research participants. Then, the researcher's role as the human instrument in the study is elaborated, and the philosophical assumptions and interpretive framework are revealed. Subsequently, the steps leading to data collection, including permissions, sampling, and participant recruitment, are explained. The sections on data collection, analysis, and synthesis provide detailed descriptions of how data was handled and how the study can be replicated. The chapter concludes with a section on trustworthiness and research ethics.

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative, hermeneutical phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of expatriate teachers (ETs). Blaikie and Priest (2019) suggested basing the research design choice on questions about the nature of the study: What will be studied, why, and how? The method should, thus, be determined by the context (Patton, 2015). I sought to understand the experiences of work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools (CIS). A qualitative design was suitable because it allowed me to explore human problems in their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry can be classified into five approaches: narrative research, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). I considered each approach to find a methodology that best corresponded to my research goals (Blaikie & Priest, 2019; Flick, 2022; Patton, 2015).

Narrative research focuses on individuals' experiences expressed in their life stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although expatriates might constitute a source of stories worth exploring, my interest pertained to a specific aspect of their lives, namely work adjustment. Thus, narrative research offered too broad a lens to answer my research questions. While ethnography, or a rich description of a culture-sharing group, appealed to me as a member of the expatriate community in China, searching for cultural themes in data did not align with my research goals (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Therefore, I also rejected ethnography as too broad to guide my study of work adjustment.

I then considered a case study methodology as a research approach aiming to examine in-depth a case or multiple cases in a real-life setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although I met many international educators in China who could contribute to thrilling case study research, my focus was on a specific phenomenon: work adjustment. I concluded that the case study approach would not allow me to answer my research questions. When considering grounded theory, I found it very appealing to conduct research aimed at discovering a theory (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), deducing a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), or constructing a theory from participant data (Charmaz, 2014). However, I decided against the grounded theory approach because I was unsure whether a new theory exists, can be discovered, or is needed for the work adjustment of ETs. Furthermore, grounded theory research involves a high degree of uncertainty, which I was uncomfortable with for my dissertation project.

I chose a phenomenological design as the most appropriate for my study. Phenomenological research originated in the transcendental philosophy of thought of Edmund Husserl and was influenced by Martin Heidegger's phenomenology of being (Larsen & Adu, 2022; Moustakas, 1994). Although studying human understanding is challenging,

phenomenology can accomplish it by collecting and comparing examples of lived experiences (Cronin, 2017). Thus, phenomenology can be a robust research design to explore complex and multifaceted human problems (Neubauer et al., 2019). Different varieties of phenomenology find use in educational and social science research. Amedeo Giorgi, Alfred Schutz, and Clark Moustakas advocated transcendental or descriptive phenomenology (Eberle, 2022; Staller & Chen, 2022). Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology is particularly distinct because of its clear research steps and unique terminology (Aguas, 2022).

However, researchers with personal experience with the studied phenomenon tend to select hermeneutical phenomenology for their projects (Thomson & Crowther, 2023). I concluded that van Manen's (1990, 2014) hermeneutical phenomenology would be the most suitable design for my study because of my insider status in the Chinese educational landscape. Hermeneutical phenomenology is always interpretive-oriented (Vagle, 2018). While transcendental phenomenologists emphasize objective descriptions of lived phenomena, van Manen (1990) claimed that "a phenomenological description is always one interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description" (p. 31).

The interpretive nature of hermeneutical phenomenology convinced me that van Manen's approach is the most appropriate to answer my research questions and utilize my familiarity with the phenomenon under study. The research sequence proposed by van Manen (1990) involves identifying a phenomenon of genuine interest to the researcher, investigating the lived experiences of the phenomenon, reflecting on the essential themes, describing the phenomenon, and considering the phenomenon as a part of a larger context. However, hermeneutical phenomenology can never follow a prearranged set of techniques because the study of lived

experience is emergent (Crowther & Thomson, 2020; van Manen, 2014). Therefore, this form of research is “extraordinarily demanding of its practitioners” (van Manen, 1990, p. 33) and requires time and patience (Thomson & Crowther, 2023).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do expatriate teachers experience work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question One

What are expatriate teachers’ experiences of adjusting their work environments (activeness) in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question Two

What are expatriate teachers’ experiences of adjusting to their work environments (reactiveness) in Chinese internationalized schools?

Sub-Question Three

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience flexibility in work adjustment?

Sub-Question Four

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience perseverance in work adjustment?

Setting and Participants

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of intentionally selecting whom to study in qualitative research and in what setting. The following sections briefly introduce the setting and the participants I chose for my study. First, I outline the main characteristics of CIS

and explain what makes these institutions a valuable setting to explore the work adjustment of ETs. Following Johnson and Christensen's (2020) recommendation to provide sufficient descriptions of the study participant pool, I then introduce my participant pool and clarify the reasons for inviting diversity to my study.

Setting

The setting for my study was the People's Republic of China. Within that large setting and diverse educational landscape, I focused on a specific kind of institution, namely CIS. These schools can be found anywhere in China, including first- and second-tier cities, but the country's densely populated southern and eastern regions witness their highest concentration (Poole et al., 2022). As I did not recruit my study participants from any specific site, my setting was CIS across the People's Republic of China.

CIS are usually private, for-profit, branded, and highly competitive schools with a blend of local and international school characteristics, employing local educators and ETs from different parts of the world (Kong et al., 2020; Wu & Koh, 2022). The schools can provide education at one specific level (e.g., high school) or function as K-12 schools with a complete educational path from kindergarten to high school on one campus (Wright et al., 2022). CIS take various organizational forms, but because foreign entities are forbidden from independently establishing and operating educational institutions in China, the schools must be owned by Sino-foreign cooperatives or local companies renting a foreign brand (Beek, 2023; Kim, 2019; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Wu & Koh, 2022). Consequently, although expatriate principals and administrators often appear alongside local ones, factual decision-making power usually belongs to the local management.

I decided to explore the work adjustment of ETs employed in CIS because these institutions might pose extraordinary adaptation challenges to international educators. On the one hand, language and cultural barriers might complicate ETs' communication and relationships with the students, the local educators, school administrators, and other personnel. On the other hand, working with expatriates from different parts of the world and all walks of life might create a truly multicultural work environment with its own challenges. The students who choose CIS do not necessarily demonstrate the expected English proficiency or show interest in international curricula but might demand privileged treatment (Poole et al., 2022; Wu & Koh, 2022). Consequently, ETs are often expected to show results beyond student capabilities (e.g., passing international college entrance exams) or might experience a lack of student motivation when teaching subjects that do not lead to exams (Poole et al., 2022). Moreover, as the demand for international teachers in China greatly surpasses the supply, the labor market welcomes accidental teachers who are often career changers and do not necessarily hold teaching licenses (Bunnell & Poole, 2022, 2023; Poole, 2020b). Therefore, the lack of formal teacher training might complicate work adjustment for many ETs in China.

Participants

As no precise guidelines about sample size in phenomenological studies exist, my intended sample included 10 to 20 ETs over the age of 18 currently employed in CIS (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). The final sample consisted of 16 individuals. They had experience with the phenomenon of work adjustment because they had been working in CIS for at least one school year at the time of participation. Since no reliable demographic data on ETs in China is available, I aimed at maximum variation in my participant pool to ensure the sample was as diverse as possible in terms of age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, mother tongue, level of

education, teaching certification status, length of tenure, and home country teaching experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I employed snowball sampling by asking each informant to identify others who met my participation criteria (Ary et al., 2019). The individuals invited to my study had something in common: they shared the experience of work adjustment. However, beyond that, they were a highly heterogeneous group.

To maximize the scope of experiences with work adjustment, I recruited individuals who teach different subjects and age levels in CIS located in different parts of China and represent different age groups, genders, lengths of tenure, nationalities, ethnicities, and levels of education. I included second-career teachers who started working as educators after arriving in China and those with previous teaching experience in their home countries. Both certified teachers and those who do not hold formal teaching credentials were welcome to participate. Furthermore, I included individuals whose first language is English and those who speak English as a second or foreign language.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the inquirer becomes an indispensable component of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Clearly stating researcher positionality is a strategy to increase the study's trustworthiness (Ary et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mills & Gay, 2019). In this section, I outline my researcher positionality by first explaining my interpretive framework and the reasons why I view my study from the lens of social constructivism. I then elucidate my philosophical assumptions expressed in ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Lastly, I explain my role as the human instrument and my motivations for conducting the study.

Interpretive Framework

The researcher's worldview influences the approach to scientific inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lens through which I viewed my study was social constructivism. It is a belief that individuals perceive the world differently, create their unique understandings, and subjectively give meaning to events (Burr, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998). Social constructivism directly opposes positivism as it emphasizes the role of study participants in creating meanings (Gall et al., 2007). To a constructivist, research does not happen in a vacuum because people rely on their contexts and interactions with others to shape their worlds (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In social constructivism, study participants become active constructors of knowledge who share their unique perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2007). Researchers operate as passionate coparticipants who employ their personal beliefs, political views, and cultural experiences to understand phenomena (Burr, 2015; Lincoln et al., 2018). Meanings cannot be reduced to narrow categories because they are negotiated and informed by actions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). Therefore, any interpretations remain subjective and influenced by researcher and participant backgrounds (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, the researcher cannot solely rely on existing theories but must generate an understanding from patterns of meanings emerging in participant views (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions shape individuals' worldviews and approaches to scientific inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because they reveal the researcher's positionality and logic to the readers, philosophical assumptions establish the foundation of qualitative studies and validate them (Crotty, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2020; J. A. Maxwell, 2022). Various competing

philosophical frameworks inform qualitative researchers (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2020). Creswell and Poth (2018) divided philosophical assumptions into three categories: ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology deals with the nature of reality and asks what can be known about it (Heron & Reason, 1997). Qualitative researchers accept that there are multiple realities in the minds of different individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My choice of a qualitative approach to inquiry resulted from my belief that objective truth exists and can be uncovered from participant experiences. Nevertheless, I was aware of the multiplicity of worldviews and life experiences contributing to reality. Thus, my ontological orientation welcomed the perspectives my coinvestigators contributed. Embracing their positions and beliefs advanced my understanding of their worlds and the phenomenon of work adjustment.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology attempts to explain what constitutes knowledge, how we gain it, and what processes validate it (Crotty, 1998; Gall et al., 2007). I recognize that in qualitative studies, it is necessary to minimize the void between the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). My position as an industry insider and a fellow expatriate in China allowed me to reach my informants and create a bond with them. Our shared status enhanced honesty and the level of detail during data collection. Thus, my findings were justified by evidence from the participants and grounded in their accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, I encouraged my participants' involvement in finding answers and articulating new questions (Lincoln et al., 2018). I tried to remain neutral and refrained from imposing my ideas and knowledge on the participants.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology asks questions about ethics and values in human life (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln et al., 2018). While all qualitative research is interpretative and value-laden, it is important to openly acknowledge researcher positionality in the broader context of the studied phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My decade-long stay in China and the awareness of the changes happening in the country gave me a unique insider perspective. I made numerous observations and undoubtedly formed subjective beliefs about China and its work culture during my decade in the country. Although I trust that my background in cultural and language studies sensitized me to otherness and prepared me to view cultures with an open mind, I acknowledge that my voice is, in the end, subjective. Furthermore, I understand the bias my Western education contributed to my perceptions of Chinese education. As my study participants shared their perspectives and experiences, I adhered to research ethics, did not impose my values and interpretations, and let my coinvestigators' voices be heard.

Researcher's Role

Qualitative researchers must accept the role of human instruments in their studies and explicitly state their presuppositions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). While being aware that I was the primary agent in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I embraced the responsibility to make clear my bias and motivations for conducting the study (van Manen, 1990, 2014). I have been interested in ETs from the first days of my employment in China. I have wondered about their motivations to work abroad, experiences of adjustment, and everyday struggles, and compared their situations to mine. I found this social group a fascinating subject for phenomenological inquiry. Therefore, I was determined to let the participants shape my findings to extend the understanding of ET work adjustment.

I saw my position as an industry insider as a substantial benefit but also a potential drawback. I have been working as an educator for nearly two decades. I spent half of this time teaching in various educational institutions in Poland, my home country. In 2015, I moved to China and engaged in teaching, teacher training, and curriculum development in the private education sector. My thorough pre-service teacher training in four subjects and previous work experience in different educational settings prepared me well for a teaching position in China. However, my job-related expectations were not always met.

I have personally experienced and witnessed in others the struggles of adjusting to the challenging work reality in China. In my places of employment, I have often been marginalized and treated as a symbol of Western culture rather than a qualified teacher (cf., Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole et al., 2022). I witnessed how stereotypical perceptions of expatriates in China and experiences of not being treated seriously complicated the adaptation of expatriate educators. My knowledge of the Chinese expatriate community and the phenomenon under study allowed me to select the proper sample for my research because I understood the potential diversity within the expatriate population (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022; Rapley, 2014).

My view of CIS has been, admittedly, skeptical. I observed that many of these institutions are extremely profit driven and hire ETs chiefly to convey a Westernized image (cf. Bunnell & Poole, 2022, 2023; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Poole, 2020b). However, I admit that my observations and experiences, although common in the literature, are not shared by all ETs in China, and I acknowledge them as my bias (van Manen, 1990, 2014). Thus, I intentionally looked for evidence disconfirming my experiences and allowed my participants to tell their stories in their own words (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I

employed purposive, maximum variation sampling to reach a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences. I did not invite my coworkers, subordinates, and friends to participate in my study because a close personal relationship would influence my neutrality as an interviewer and could lead to coercive pressure, a power imbalance, and the deference effect (Bernard, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2020).

Moreover, I strictly adhered to the recommended procedures and best practices of data collection and analysis in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2021). I employed numerous trustworthiness strategies, including member checking, member reflections, negative case analysis, audit trail, and triangulation, to control my bias (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the same time, I embraced my role as the human instrument and used my position as an industry insider to the advantage of my study. I retained my emerging thoughts and comparisons in memos (see Appendix J for examples) and a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomson & Crowther, 2023).

Procedures

This section outlines the procedures necessary to prepare for efficient data collection and analysis. I explain the role of the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in safeguarding ethical research and list the steps I took to protect participant rights. Subsequently, I elucidate my recruitment plan and justify my sampling choices. Lastly, I clarify how I showed reciprocity to my coinvestigators.

Permissions

Researchers must strive for beneficence, or acting for the good of society, and nonmaleficence, that is, protecting research participants from harm (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). At a minimum, the benefits of a study should outweigh the risks it carries for the

participants (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000). An IRB safeguards these principles by evaluating the ethical acceptability of a proposed study and aiding scholars in resolving ethical issues (Hunter, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Therefore, I sought Liberty University IRB approval (see Appendix A) for my study before recruiting participants and collecting data.

Consent contains three components: information, comprehension, and voluntariness (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I informed my participants of the goals and methods of my research and ensured they had expressed informed, active consent in writing (see Appendix C) before committing to the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). As weak consent leads to participant inhibitions and reduced openness, I ensured my informants felt secure and protected (Miles et al., 2014; Tracy, 2020). I explained their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences (Howitt, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Although anonymity could not be afforded in my study, I explained how I provided participant confidentiality (Ary et al., 2019; M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Tracy, 2020). I consistently used pseudonyms to mask the identities of my participants and did not mention the names of their schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Howitt, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Organizational permissions were unnecessary as I recruited my coinvestigators within the Chinese expatriate community and through snowball sampling (Tracy, 2020).

Recruitment Plan

Sampling means selecting participants or sites suitable to provide insight into a phenomenon (Ary et al., 2019; Tracy, 2020). Sampling decisions form the foundation of qualitative studies and should be based on the inquirer's careful judgment early in the research planning phase (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022; Patton, 2022; Rapley, 2014). My recruitment plan responded to the research problem and the purpose of my study (Patton, 2022). *Ecological*

validity, that is, capturing life as it is lived outside the constraints of research encounters, dictated my choice of study participants (Wertz et al., 2011). Schreier (2018) posited that phenomenological studies do not require an elaborate sampling strategy and can rely on convenience sampling because having experience with the phenomenon is a sufficient participation criterion. Although my initial group of participants was a convenience sample of individuals known to me from the Chinese expatriate community, I employed *purposive sampling*, an intentional selection of study participants for their ability to inform the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2022; Tracy, 2020). As purposive sampling branches into numerous types that can be combined for a better effect, my sampling plan utilized three strategies: maximum variation sampling, snowball sampling, and inclusion of key informants (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2022; Schreier, 2018).

The participants in my study met all of the following criteria:

1. an expatriate, that is, a non-Chinese citizen living and working in China,
2. over the age of 18,
3. current employment in a Chinese internationalized school,
4. employment history in a Chinese internationalized school of at least one school year and, thus, familiarity with work adjustment in this type of institution,
5. commitment to participate in all three data collection modes.

I used a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) to make the criteria explicit to potential participants.

I employed maximum variation sampling to maximize the differences in informant characteristics and potential experiences with the phenomenon (Ary et al., 2019; Tracy, 2020). I aimed at demographic variation by welcoming individuals who differed in age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, mother tongue, level of education, teaching certification status, length of

tenure, and home country teaching experience (Sandelowski, 1995). I utilized a matrix to trace participant features and ensure all criteria were diversified across the sample (Schreier, 2018).

Information-rich cases, that is, individuals who can contribute extensive data to answer the research questions, are the most desirable type of participant in qualitative research (Patton, 2022; Rapley, 2014; Schreier, 2018). Although all my participants had experienced the phenomenon under study, I could not determine in advance if an individual was genuinely information rich. Therefore, in my study, positive deviance sampling, or identifying individuals who are exceptionally informative to the research problem, was not a feasible strategy (Patton, 2022; Tracy, 2020). To ensure that my participant pool contained information-rich cases, I planned to include at least two “key knowledgeable,” that is, key informants with “valuable expertise on and insights into the root of problems” (Patton, 2022, p. 1177). These individuals were expatriates who had, before coming to China, worked as teachers in their home countries. They had a broad perspective on work adjustment in schools and the benefit of cross-cultural comparisons.

Decisions about the sample size remain controversial and are often underemphasized in qualitative research (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022; Schreier, 2018). Moreover, the methods literature abounds in conflicting advice about the optimal participant numbers. Phenomenological studies have successfully been conducted with sample sizes ranging from one to 325 informants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Researcher judgment and familiarity with the context are, thus, necessary for prudent sampling decisions (Ary et al., 2019). Notably, data saturation is usually achieved with a small sample of information-rich participants (Hennink et al., 2020; Schreier, 2018), but redundancy and oversampling pose a big problem in many qualitative studies (Ary et al., 2019; Schreier, 2018). Engaging the time and energy of additional

informants when no new insight is generated constitutes an ethical problem because participant resources are wasted to no effect (Schreier, 2018).

Therefore, I first invited a convenience sample of five participants known to me from the Chinese expatriate community. A sixth participant who initially refused my invitation decided to join later. I did not recruit informants with whom I had a close private or professional relationship, such as my coworkers, subordinates, or close friends, to preserve my neutrality as a researcher and avoid issues of power imbalance, coercive pressure, and the deference effect (Bernard, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Then, I recruited more participants through snowball sampling, a strategy that utilizes the current participants' social networks to identify further individuals appropriate for the study (Ary et al., 2019). After collecting data from the first 10 participants, I examined the emergent codes and categories and continued recruiting participants until saturation occurred (Rapley, 2014; Schreier, 2018). The final sample included 16 participants.

I agree with Creswell and Guetterman (2019) that informants should not receive financial incentives for participation in a study. However, I embrace the notion of reciprocity in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Howitt, 2019). To reciprocate the time and energy the informants contributed to my study, I ensured their stories were heard and told accurately and confidentially (Ary et al., 2019; Seidman, 2019). Furthermore, I offered my coinvestigators an opportunity to shape and verify the study's findings through member checks and member reflections (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2020).

Data Collection Plan

Qualitative researchers rely on multiple data sources to understand the studied phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Triangulating data*, that is, utilizing and comparing

multiple information sources and methods, strengthens a study by increasing the credibility and validity of its findings and providing a more wholesome depiction of the phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Mills & Gay, 2019; Patton, 2015). In a broader sense, triangulation enhances the understanding of the studied phenomena by clarifying any data discrepancies (Eberle, 2014; Flick, 2018). Qualitative researchers have traditionally employed three main data sources: interviews, observations, and documents or artifacts (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). However, any source of information can be useful to a researcher interested in exploring the meaning of lived experiences (Vagle, 2018).

Although very common in qualitative research, in-depth interviews offer a limited and often contrived form of expression (Wertz et al., 2011). Therefore, I supplemented individual interviews with two other data sources: written protocols and focus groups. These data sources allowed me to obtain both spontaneous and reflective accounts of work adjustment in CIS. I began with semi-structured, individual interviews to elicit personal experiences, stories, and anecdotes about work adjustment. After my coinvestigators processed their interview responses, I asked them to give a thoughtful, written response to a prompt. Lastly, to provoke more sharing and achieve triangulation, I confronted my participants with the stories and experiences of other expatriates in focus groups.

I am committed to the notion of reciprocity or giving back to the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2019). Moreover, I support van Manen's (1990) idea that research should affect and change the participants through reflection. My research cycle was designed to collect the data necessary to answer my research questions and allow my participants to gain something significant from the study. The informants started their reflection in semi-structured, individual interviews, then thought more about their experiences during protocol writing, to finally validate

and evaluate their newly accessed insights in focus group discussions (Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019). This research cycle enriched the participants' understanding of themselves and their work adjustment.

Individual Interviews

Interviews belong to the most popular methods of qualitative data collection and find application in various scientific disciplines (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Interviews prove invaluable when observation cannot be used, or observational data cannot answer the research questions (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In phenomenological studies, interviews constitute the primary data source (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022). Qualitative interviews are purposeful conversations used to gather first-hand accounts of participants' knowledge, opinions, feelings, and experiences (Crowther & Thomson, 2020; Roulston & Halpin, 2022). Qualitative interviews usually share three features: they are open-ended, flexible, and lead to rich and detailed data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I utilized individual, semi-structured interviews as my primary data collection method. Ary et al. (2019) defined a semi-structured or partially structured interview as a conversation guided by a set of pre-formulated questions that can be modified according to the emergent nature of the exchange. The sequence and the exact wording of the questions should, thus, be flexible and match the flow of the conversation (Roberts, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The temporary relationship between the interviewer and interviewee in qualitative research must lead to a meaningful exchange of ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I perceived my interviews as a collaborative effort and intended to make my participants partners in dialog and reflection (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Present-day interviewing techniques often rely on digital technologies to help people

living far apart meet online while minimizing the demand for a quiet interview place (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Roulston & Halpin, 2022). Synchronous online interviews with audio and video functionalities allow a similar experience to in-person conversations (Roulston & Halpin, 2022). As my participants were ETs living in different parts of China, reaching all of them for an in-person interview was not feasible, considering the large distances between Chinese cities. Moreover, no participant requested a face-to-face interview. Therefore, I conducted each interview via Microsoft Teams. I ensured the length of each conversation stayed approximately between 30 and 60 minutes so the interviewees remained engaged and focused. All interviews were audio and video recorded, and automatic transcripts were generated by Microsoft Teams. To create an opportunity for member checking, I provided each participant with an interview transcript within three days of the interview.

I used three strategies to keep the flow of the interviews: follow-up questions, probes, and embracing silence (Ary et al., 2019). Follow-up questions allow researchers to elicit further details from participant accounts (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Probes show researcher involvement and lead to a clarification of expressed ideas (Roberts, 2020; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Lastly, accepting natural pauses and moments of silence without interjecting is necessary to give informants time to process their thoughts and recollect their stories (van Manen, 1990). Despite my familiarity with the phenomenon of work adjustment in CIS, I refrained from including my personal experiences in the conversations with my coinvestigators (Seidman, 2019). During the interviews with my participants, I discreetly took notes to enhance my later analysis (Saldaña, 2021) and inform my responses to participant statements (Patton, 2015). Immediately after the interviews, I took time to reflect on and memo my emergent thoughts and impressions of the conversations (Roberts, 2020).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself as if we just met for the first time. CRQ
2. What did you do for a living before coming to China? CRQ
3. Tell me your reasons for coming to China and why you decided to work here as a teacher.
CRQ
4. How do you feel about living and working in China? CRQ
5. Try to remember your first days at your current job. What shocked or surprised you about your school and its environment? CRQ
6. What aspects of your job satisfy you the most? CRQ
7. What aspects of your job dissatisfy you the most? CRQ
8. Think of a turning point in your work when you decided something must change. What was the thing you needed to change? SQ3
9. How long did you wait until you decided to start this change? SQ3
10. Think of some more situations when you decided to change something significant in your work environment. How did you attempt the change? SQ1
11. Please give me some more examples of changes you made to your work environment.
Think of the people you work with, the physical space, or your teaching. SQ1
12. Please give me an example of something you *would like to change* in your work environment but you think it is impossible. SQ1
13. Share some situations when you decided to change something significant about *yourself* to match the requirements of your work. SQ2
14. Please give me some more examples of changes you made to *yourself*. Think of the people you work with, the physical space, or your teaching. SQ2

15. Please give me an example of something your school would like to change about you but you cannot or will not change. Why is it an impossible change for you? SQ2
16. What motivates you to persevere in your job? SQ4
17. Think of a situation that would push you to quit your job. What expectations or requirements would be too much to accept? SQ4
18. What other experiences of work adjustment can you share? CRQ

In hermeneutical phenomenology, interview questions must be meaningful to the informants and close to their everyday lives (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000). However, the questions should also be broad and challenging to encourage participant reflection on the meaning of events and experiences (Roberts, 2020; Roulston & Choi, 2018). My interview questions were related to the research questions and stayed close to the participants' everyday work experiences. As the choice of interview questions can determine the quality of collected data, I consulted my interview protocol with experts in the field (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2020). I had initially anticipated the need for potential modification to the phrasing of some questions following the first interviews, but it proved unnecessary.

The purpose of the initial questions was to make the participant comfortable, create rapport and trust, and gather some background information about the interviewee. The participants had an opportunity to talk about their personal journeys and reasons for coming to China, which is a natural starting point for conversations in the expatriate community. Questions 5 to 7 led the participants toward the topic of work adjustment by inquiring about their general impressions of and feelings about the job. The remaining questions were ordered in a way that allowed smooth transitions from one aspect of work adjustment to another.

TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) describes work adjustment as a consequence of job dissatisfaction. Employees experiencing person-environment discordance initiate adjustment behaviors in the form of activeness, that is, attempts to change the work environment, or reactivity, that is, attempts to change the self to match the requirements of the environment. Questions 10 to 12 led to accounts of activeness, while Questions 13 to 15 focused on reactivity. Furthermore, TWA describes flexibility as the capacity for tolerating dissatisfaction, and perseverance explains how long an employee attempts adjustment before quitting the job. Questions 8 and 9 inquired about the participants' flexibility, and Questions 16 and 17 referred to their perseverance in work adjustment. The last question was a wrap-up, enabling the interviewees to share any additional information they considered valuable.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process began with interview transcripts. I wanted to ensure the transcripts precisely reflected my conversations with the participants (Roulston & Halpin, 2022). Therefore, I manually checked the transcripts generated by Microsoft Teams against the interview recordings and corrected any inaccuracies. To reflect the coinvestigator's state of mind when responding to questions and prompts, I retained the most apparent indicators of mood, reluctance, hesitation, or insistence, for example, um, well, yeah, chuckle (Roulston, 2014).

I asked the participants to member check their interview transcripts, and two reported minor corrections (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Saldaña, 2021). Member checking the transcripts also benefitted the participants by effecting deeper reflection about their experiences, which could assist protocol writing (van Manen, 1990). Repeatedly reading and rereading the transcripts helped me immerse myself in the data, obtain a general sense of the material, and prepare for the subsequent data reduction (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell & Guetterman,

2019; Seidman, 2019). I then employed the selective reading approach (van Manen, 1990, 2014) to identify all statements related to the topic (Roulston, 2014). All data deemed unrelated at this stage was stored for potential referential adequacy later in the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, personal information about the participants and their backgrounds was retained in my memos and participant profiles (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I utilized ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software to manage and code the interview transcripts. Despite employing a semi-structured interview protocol and questions targeting specific aspects of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), I applied inductive, emergent, data-driven coding that matched the goals of phenomenology (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2021). I looked for codes arising in participant statements rather than forcing the data to fit the codes derived from my theoretical framework (Roulston, 2014). Saldaña (2021) noted that *eclectic coding*, that is, a purposeful choice of coding type in response to the data, is particularly appropriate for first-cycle coding in studies employing multiple data sources. Therefore, I used eclectic, line-by-line coding for all interviews and then sorted the emerging codes into categories (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). I refrained from considering themes until participants' written protocols were analyzed.

Protocol Writing

Protocol writing refers to involving participants in generating original texts that can aid the researcher in investigating the meaning of the experience (van Manen, 1990). Writing can help individuals organize their thoughts and access perceptions and events unavailable on the conscious level (Stamper, 2020; van Manen, 2014). It offers the benefit of deep reflection but also places some linguistic demands on the participants (van Manen, 1990). The researcher should request straightforward, unedited language rather than elaborate essays to avoid

distracting the participants from the lived experience with the strain of writing (Vagle, 2018). Moreover, van Manen (1990) suggested directing the participants to focus on plausibility rather than the accuracy of their accounts. Therefore, the protocol does not have to be well-written, carefully edited, or very detailed but should simply present how the participant experienced the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018).

One form of written protocol is the reflective letter. Letter writing is a rare data collection method, but one that allows the participants to open up and take control of their reporting (Stamper, 2020). A written simulation can help the participants contextualize the problem, get into a role, and reflect on questions that would be difficult to answer directly in an interview (Patton, 2015). To make writing accessible to my participants, I requested a reflective letter to a younger self with advice about work adjustment in China.

A reflective letter was particularly appropriate for my study because it supplemented the spontaneity of individual interviews with some quiet reflection. The writing prompt was an extension of the interview questions and chiefly aimed to answer the central research question. I assumed that the interviews initiated reflection about work adjustment and naturally led my informants to more thoughts and recollections. Thus, the protocol task allowed the participants to organize their experiences in writing and fill the gaps in the interviews with newly accessed perceptions (van Manen, 1990).

Although Vagle (2018) proposed providing the informants with an example of a written response, I did not offer one because a sample response might lead the participants. I did not want protocol writing to feel like tedious homework, but I suggested a response of no less than two paragraphs to give the informants a feeling of the expected minimum. Unless the participants requested the writing prompt immediately after the interviews, I emailed it a week

after providing them with their interview transcripts for member checking. I asked my coinvestigators to complete their protocols within one week.

Protocol Writing Prompt

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self in the first days of a new job at a Chinese internationalized school? What would you propose to do differently? What mistakes would you want to avoid? Write a letter to your younger self listing a few pieces of crucial advice. As you give your advice, try to think of specific events and situations that you have experienced or that your younger self may experience. Make sure your letter is at least two paragraphs long.

Protocol Writing Data Analysis Plan

I used the detailed reading approach when analyzing my participants' written protocols (van Manen, 1990, 2014). Considering the meaning of each statement was justified because the protocols were deliberate, thoughtful expressions of coinvestigators' experiences. After importing the data to ATLAS.ti for line-by-line coding, I read the letters multiple times to immerse myself in participant experiences (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000). Eclectic coding allowed me flexibility in assigning codes to the experiences expressed in the letters (Saldaña, 2021; Stamper, 2020). I compared the codes to those obtained from individual interviews, unified the codes, and then began to form categories.

Thematic analysis is a highly intuitive and creative process that entails “recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text” (van Manen, 2014, p. 319). Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a flexible approach to thematic analysis consisting of six steps: getting familiar with the data through repeated reading, initial coding, creating preliminary themes, refining the themes, defining the final themes, and

writing a report. Therefore, I progressed to second-cycle coding after creating a cohesive list of codes and categories from interviews and protocols. Saldaña (2021) recommended pattern coding, a method of summarizing categories into themes or meta codes, to synthesize the categories obtained during first-cycle coding. When theming the data phenomenologically, I considered what the phenomenon of work adjustment was and what it meant to the participants (Saldaña, 2021; van Manen, 2014). I refined the themes and checked them against the codes to arrive at a set of final themes. Reflective memos captured my theming considerations and choices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Groups

A *focus group* is a data collection method utilizing social interaction to induce a conversation on a topic suggested by the researcher (D. L. Morgan, 1996, 2017). Despite using individual interviews as the primary information source in my study, I chose focus groups, another form of interviewing, as the third method in my data collection plan. Individual interviews rely on an exchange between the researcher and the participant. In contrast, focus groups utilize social dynamics to drive interactions between several people and lead to new, spontaneous accounts and perspectives unobtainable in other contexts (Caillaud & Flick, 2017; Caillaud et al., 2022; Hennink et al., 2020). Focus groups can show what matters to the participants rather than the researcher (Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019). Used in addition to other data collection methods, focus groups offer triangulation (Caillaud & Flick, 2017; Caillaud et al., 2022), validation (Hennink et al., 2020), and evaluation of findings (Howitt, 2019).

The purpose of focus groups is straightforward, but contradictory advice about their practice can be found in the literature (Caillaud et al., 2022; Howitt, 2019). I attempted to create focus groups that supported open discussions. Different authors suggest different participant

numbers for focus groups, but an optimal group size for engaged informants should range from three to six people (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hennink et al., 2020; Lobe, 2017; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). I planned to invite three to six individuals to each of my focus groups because the informants in my study were knowledgeable about the topic under study and because my focus groups served as data validation rather than initial exploration (Hennink et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the first focus group I scheduled only had two participants because one individual did not attend due to a family emergency. As the other two participants could not join focus groups at any of the later times, I decided to continue with the limited attendance. I found that the discussion generated valuable insight. The remaining three focus groups had four participants each.

I conducted the focus groups online using Microsoft Teams. The virtual format might appear to be a limitation. However, research has shown that online focus groups resemble the face-to-face experience, lead to similar group dynamics, and enhance participant socialization (Caillaud et al., 2022; Lobe, 2017). Moreover, because the informants might perceive online focus groups as more informal, they are likely to share more openly (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Another obvious benefit of the online format is its convenience for the participants and the researcher. To prevent participant fatigue, each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes. I checked the connection quality with each participant beforehand to minimize the risk of technical issues (Lobe, 2017).

Skillful moderation and multitasking are expected of the researcher leading focus groups to facilitate interaction and respond to different participant personalities (Hennink et al., 2020). Knowing some of my coinvestigators' experiences from their individual interviews and protocols helped me manage the group dynamics effectively. As a moderator, I avoided expressing my

views and showing judgment (Howitt, 2019). I actively listened to the participants, used probing to promote depth and detail of information, and encouraged all participants to contribute to the discussions (Hennink et al., 2020).

Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell us where you work, what you teach, and what is special or interesting about your job. CRQ
2. What drove you to become a teacher in China? CRQ
3. What spontaneously comes to mind when you think of work adjustment in your school? CRQ
4. How well do you think you adjusted to your current job? SQ1, SQ2
5. What drives you to stay in your school rather than change to another job? SQ3
6. If you could give one piece of advice to your employers and supervisors, what would it be? CRQ
7. What other thoughts do you have about work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools? CRQ

A focus group discussion should be divided into stages, naturally lead to conversational flow, and intensify the group dynamics (Caillaud et al., 2022; Howitt, 2019). The moderator should begin with an introduction, the ground rules, and some opening questions to create rapport between the participants. Questions 1 and 2 aimed to make the participants comfortable and curious about each other. They were typical starter questions expatriates ask each other when meeting for the first time. Most participants had ready answers to these questions.

After making the interviewees comfortable, the moderator transitions to specific questions that provide substantial data (Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019). Questions 3 to 5

targeted the central research question and the sub-questions. However, they were relatively general and allowed the participants to share what was particularly significant to them (Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019). These questions led to a lively exchange because comparing the working conditions and job demands in different contexts evoked strong responses. Question 5 was somewhat sensitive because it focused on the reasons for perseverance and potential turnover. It was deliberately placed late in the focus group protocol to allow the participants to become more comfortable with each other before answering it.

In the last phase of the focus group discussion, ending questions are used to summarize the conversation and offer closure to the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Questions 6 and 7 aimed to synthesize the discussion and give the participants one last opportunity to add valuable insights. Question 6 was particularly interesting because it enabled the interviewees to role-play a situation many might have visualized in moments of despair at their jobs (Patton, 2015). As the focus groups concluded the research cycle for the participants and completed their reflection on work adjustment, I offered each group a glimpse at my preliminary findings based on individual interviews and protocols and asked for feedback and comments.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Analyzing focus groups generally relies on the same methods as analyzing individual interviews (D. L. Morgan & Hoffman, 2018). I utilized the automatic transcripts generated by Microsoft Teams and checked them to ensure accuracy, a transparent notation system, and correct attribution of utterances to speakers (Barbour, 2014; Caillaud et al., 2022). I retained pauses and mood indicators in the text to reflect the coinvestigators' interjections, hesitation, or searches for the right words (Roulston, 2014). Whenever relevant, previously undisclosed

information about the informants and their backgrounds emerged, I added it to the participant profiles (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Upon text transfer to ATLAS.ti, I began a detailed, line-by-line reading of the transcripts (van Manen, 1990, 2014). I acquainted myself with the content through repeated reading and rereading to gain familiarity with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). Because focus groups served as a data validation and triangulation method (Caillaud & Flick, 2017; Caillaud et al., 2022; Hennink et al., 2020), I coded the focus group text deductively, looking for codes and categories previously identified in individual interviews and written protocols (Saldaña, 2021). However, I remained open to contradictions, outliers, and new findings (D. L. Morgan & Hoffman, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

Data Synthesis

Qualitative researchers do not wait until all data are collected to reflect on their findings; data collection, analysis, synthesis, and interpretation should co-occur (M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Leavy, 2017; Seidman, 2019). The hermeneutic circle of inquiry involves an iterative process of considering the parts of a phenomenon to understand it in its entirety (Crowther & Thomson, 2020, 2023). In my study, individual interview questions (see Appendix D) and the protocol prompt (see Appendix E) were used for discovery, while focus group questions (see Appendix F) chiefly served for data validation and triangulation (Caillaud & Flick, 2017; Caillaud et al., 2022; Hennink et al., 2020). After coding and creating categories for interview transcripts and written protocols, I developed participant profiles containing their backgrounds, most notable quotes, and all codes and categories that appeared in participant data (Seidman, 2019). An emergent coding sourcebook (see Appendix I for a sample) developed as my data analysis and synthesis progressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

Then, I reexamined all the data and began searching for themes. Saldaña (2021) acknowledged that themes rarely emerge from data; the researcher must construct and interpret them. When developing my themes, I returned to my central research question, the three sub-questions, the main tenets of TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), and my literature review to ensure the themes remained close to the foci of the study. The codes and categories identified in focus group transcripts confirmed the themes most relevant to the participants (D. L. Morgan & Hoffman, 2018).

Different authors recommend different numbers of themes in a single study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Saldaña, 2021). In my study, I constructed four final themes and 10 sub-themes. When developing the final set of themes, I employed free imaginative variation to validate the necessity of individual themes for the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Free imaginative variation allows the researcher to examine whether removing a theme would deprive the phenomenon of its inherent meaning. Thus, free imaginative variation facilitated the generation of essential themes and helped me limit their ultimate number (van Manen, 1990).

Subsequently, I examined all my data existentially (van Manen, 1990, 2014). Hermeneutical inquiry is guided by the five existentials of spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time), relationality (lived human relation), corporeality (lived body), and materiality (lived things and technology; van Manen, 2014). The existentials shape the essential composition of the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). These “universal themes of life” are inseparable from phenomenological reflection and writing because they form the lived experiences of all people (van Manen, 1990, p. 302).

Throughout the data analysis and synthesis process, I memoed my thoughts and observations (see Appendix J for examples) to record any emerging interpretations and leave a trail of my analytic insight (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). I noted any similarities and differences between the experiences of my coinvestigators and my own (Larsen & Adu, 2022). After all data collection was completed and a working set of themes was developed, I emailed my participants a summary of my findings. I asked them to respond within one week if they had critical feedback. It gave my coinvestigators an opportunity for member reflections, afforded them a final chance to contribute and voice their opinions before the findings were formulated, and added trustworthiness to the study (Tracy, 2020). Twelve participants responded to this opportunity and expressed their approval of the findings.

In interpretive research, a balance is necessary between reflexivity and subjectivity and between what the participants and the researcher contribute (Willig, 2017). I assumed the phenomenological attitude of *bridling* that includes bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) and adds “an understanding that not only takes care of the particular pre-understanding, but the understanding as a whole” (K. Dahlberg, 2006, p. 16). H. Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2020) posited that hermeneutically oriented researchers should not eliminate but only “keep an eye on and keep in check” their presuppositions, developing understandings, and bias (p. 460). While bracketing looks backward and attempts to eliminate all researcher presuppositions, bridling looks forward to the phenomenon manifesting in its entirety and takes advantage, although skeptically, of what the researcher brings to the study (Vagle, 2018). Bridling allowed me to connect my objectivity and subjectivity and prevent my evolving understanding from developing too fast or randomly (H. Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020).

As a final data synthesis step, I contrasted and compared my findings with the extant literature (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; van Manen, 1990). In phenomenological terms, I searched for *insight cultivators*, that is, sources of insight derived from philosophic sources and humanistic literature that can aid reflective interpretations of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014).

Consulting the findings with the extant literature can enhance a study's internal consistency (Morse, 2022) and validate the outcomes (van Manen, 1990). Moreover, I discussed the findings with my participants and other experts in the field to enhance the trustworthiness of my results (Mills & Gay, 2019; Thomson & Crowther, 2023).

Trustworthiness

Even the most thorough qualitative researcher can never assure that the skeptical reader will be convinced of the study's value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomson & Crowther, 2023). Trustworthiness pertains to rigor in qualitative inquiry. It deals with questions about why the findings should be trusted, are worth the researcher's effort, and warrant the reader's time (Ary et al., 2019). Trustworthiness reflects the researcher's attempts to show the value of the study, but the final judge is always the consumer of the research report (Ary et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Many paradigms for establishing quality and rigor appear in the methods literature (e.g., Creswell & Miller, 2000; Eisner, 2017; Lather, 1991; Tracy, 2020; Whitemore et al., 2001; E. N. Williams & Morrow, 2009). I chose Lincoln and Guba's (1985) validity framework that is a well-established and widely cited approach to trustworthiness encompassing numerous criteria also mentioned by other authors (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Thomson & Crowther, 2023). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) strategies align with many evaluation criteria proposed by van Manen (2014) for phenomenological research.

Credibility

Credibility, the qualitative equivalent of internal validity, is the truth value of a study in relation to the researched reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It encompasses the truthfulness and accuracy of the findings and invites the reader to join the discourse (Ary et al., 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019; Thomson & Crowther, 2023). In my study, I employed five credibility strategies: prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, member reflections, negative case analysis, and triangulation. *Triangulation* describes gathering, comparing, and cross-checking multiple data types from various sources and methods to generate robust evidence (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Mills & Gay, 2019). I aimed to achieve triangulation by engaging multiple informants with varying perspectives on the phenomenon and collecting data from individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups.

Prolonged engagement in the field allows researchers to build rapport with the coinvestigators, learn the setting and its culture, confront personal bias, and guard against potential misinformation resulting from differing participant accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a phenomenological study, sustained engagement with the phenomenon is crucial for the credibility of the findings (Vagle, 2018). My nearly decade-long employment in the Chinese education industry led to my immersion in the context of the study. Moreover, it facilitated persistent observation, allowed me to notice the different facets of expatriate work adjustment, and sensitized me to typical and atypical features of the Chinese ET community (Mills & Gay, 2019). While embracing the benefits of prolonged field engagement, I remained vigilant to its risks, such as overrapport with the participants and premature closure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checking involves testing the study's findings and interpretations with the participants who provided the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Tracy (2020) disputed the value of member checks and cited evidence suggesting that member checks alone do not facilitate valuable researcher-participant exchanges. She proposed *member reflections*, that is, discussions with the participants about their questions and opinions about the author's findings. Member reflections generate insight and collaboration rather than merely confirmation of the outcomes. Member checking and member reflections support the notion of reciprocity in qualitative inquiry because the researcher shares the emergent findings with the participants in return for their time and engagement with the project (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Howitt, 2019; Seidman, 2019). As my study aimed to capture the essence of participants' experiences, their endorsement of my analyses and any additional insight were highly desirable (Tracy, 2020; Willig, 2017). Therefore, I invited my coinvestigators to review their individual interview transcripts and give critical feedback about my emergent findings. I welcomed their suggestions and included them in my memos.

Negative case analysis occurs when researchers intentionally search for evidence that could dispute their expectations (Ary et al., 2019). I remained open to alternative interpretations by exploring unexpected and intriguing findings and avoiding forcing my data into predefined categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021; Willig, 2017). I remained aware of and disclosed in my report my experiences with the phenomenon of work adjustment and kept a reflexive journal to recognize and control my bias (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I deliberately searched for disconfirming evidence to achieve structural corroboration (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisner, 2017; Mills & Gay, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability represents how much the study's findings can be applied to other contexts (Ary et al., 2019; Leavy, 2017) and is the qualitative equivalent of external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability should not be confused with *generalizability*, that is, an application of the findings to context-free populations in quantitative research (Mills & Gay, 2019; Schreier, 2018; Thomson & Crowther, 2023; Tracy, 2020). Generalization is rarely expected of qualitative research as the findings aim to provide insight rather than an extension to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; J. A. Maxwell, 2022; Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022; Patton, 2022). Demonstrating transferability is difficult as it chiefly depends on context similarity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My study relied on four transferability strategies: descriptive adequacy, limiting reactivity, purposive sampling, and cross-case comparisons (Ary et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ary et al. (2019) defined *descriptive adequacy* as precise and exhaustive descriptions of the participants and the study context that allow the reader to determine transferability. *Thick description*, the term preferred by Lincoln and Guba (1985), involves sufficient vivid detail, strong action verbs, in vivo quotes, and clear connections between ideas (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my study, I provided a thick, rich description to allow the reader of my research report to determine the connections to the broader context (Tracy, 2020). Moreover, I offered extensive explanations of the social and cultural setting and depicted my participants with as much detail as was possible without compromising their identities (Thomson & Crowther, 2023).

Although eliminating researcher influence in a qualitative study is impossible, I aimed at limiting *reactivity*, that is, the effect of the study on its participants (Ary et al., 2019). I informed my coinvestigators of my personal connection to the phenomenon of work adjustment and my

motivations for conducting the study. When selecting my participants, I used purposive sampling with multiple variation to ensure the range of explored experiences and perspectives was as wide as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I employed cross-case comparisons by revealing the similarities and differences between the participants and their accounts to increase the potential transferability of my findings to other contexts (Ary et al., 2019).

Dependability

Researchers must demonstrate to their readers how they arrived at their findings by explicating data collection, analysis, and synthesis (Thomson & Crowther, 2023). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined *dependability* as the stability or consistency of research findings upon replication. An *audit trail* is the qualitative inquirer's documentation, including all the raw data; the research steps and their timelines, methodologies, and rationale; and the study's findings (Ary et al., 2019). To achieve the auditability of my study, I stored all the raw data and their reductions and interpretations in clearly labeled files. I documented all my decisions in memos and a reflexive journal and recorded all my research steps for the review of my dissertation committee and the qualitative research director at Liberty University. Furthermore, my manuscript includes the IRB Approval Letter (see Appendix A), recruitment letter (see Appendix B), participant consent form (see Appendix C), code counts for themes and sub-themes (see Appendix G), a sample code list for one of the interviews (see Appendix H), a sample code list for one of the sub-themes (see Appendix I), and samples of my memos (see Appendix J).

Confirmability

Objectivity in qualitative research is unachievable, but inquirers must strive for the confirmability of their findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020). *Confirmability* defines the neutrality from researcher bias and objectivity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mills & Gay,

2019). Throughout the study, I kept a reflexive journal and practiced *reflexivity*, that is, self-reflection aimed at recognizing and limiting my bias (Ary et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mills & Gay, 2019). To make my bias explicit, I asked a friend to interview me at the onset of the study using the interview protocol I designed for my participants (Thomson & Crowther, 2023; Tracy, 2020). It is a common technique employed to identify the researcher's conscious and unconscious presuppositions (Thomson & Crowther, 2023). I coded my interview transcript and kept its summary in my memos for reference during data analysis and synthesis.

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics guide scholars in conducting studies that uphold moral values (Hammersley, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). Qualitative researchers deal with numerous ethical considerations when planning their studies, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, and publishing their research results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because of my focus on the work adjustment of ETs in China and the potential risk to my participants when revealing delicate issues of their employment, I attached the utmost importance to research ethics and participant protection. I consulted any emerging ethical considerations with my dissertation committee throughout the project.

In studies with human subjects, researchers must take responsibility for the informants' well-being and ensure the study's benefits outweigh the potential risks to the participants (Hunter, 2018; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). I informed all potential participants of my research goals, the risks and benefits of participation, and my policies for participant protection (Ary et al., 2019; Hammersley, 2018). I ensured the interested individuals of the voluntary nature of their participation and the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences (Howitt, 2019; Tracy, 2020). I confirmed that I was the only person handling the

data (Gall et al., 2007). All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C) approved by the Liberty University IRB before data collection (Carpenter, 2018; Howitt, 2019; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). As IRBs are not common in all countries and some of my participants were unfamiliar with this requirement, I explained its rationale (Tracy, 2020).

To avoid the issues of power imbalance, coercive pressure, and the deference effect, I did not recruit participants who were my close friends, coworkers, or subordinates (Bernard, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). I provided no financial incentives to encourage participation, but I adhered to good practices of relational ethics by treating my informants as coinvestigators rather than exploitable data sources (Tracy, 2020; van Manen, 1990, 2014). The opportunity for interested participants to shape the emerging findings reciprocated their time and engagement (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Howitt, 2019).

When handling data, I used pseudonyms to mask the identities of my participants, and I did not reveal the names of their schools (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Howitt, 2019; Tracy, 2020). During the interviews, some stories, anecdotes, and specific details of participants' personal and professional lives emerged that, despite masked names, could expose their identities and endanger their employment in China (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). To prevent deductive disclosure, I presented some potentially revealing information, such as participants' countries of origin, the names of the cities where they were employed, or the subjects they taught in a generalized or aggregated form (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracy, 2020). Although my study could not achieve anonymity, I provided participant confidentiality and discussed with the informants how their data was stored and portrayed in my research report (Ary et al., 2019; M. Z. Cohen et al., 2000; Tracy, 2020). Moreover, all records remained password protected and stored

electronically on my personal computer in a locked cabinet in my home office during data collection, analysis, synthesis, and after the study was concluded (Ary et al., 2019; Tracy, 2020).

All data will be erased and overwritten three years after the publication of my dissertation.

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. I selected van Manen's (1990, 2014) hermeneutical phenomenology as a suitable approach to answer my research questions and utilize my position as an industry insider in the Chinese educational landscape. My familiarity with the phenomenon under study was beneficial, but it also carried the risk of researcher bias. Therefore, I employed multiple strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings. My constructivist orientation and attachment to the notion of reciprocity in qualitative research led me to plan for participant involvement in shaping the research findings. Three data sources allowed me to obtain rich descriptions of participant experiences with work adjustment: individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. I followed van Manen's (1990, 2014) framework for hermeneutical phenomenology, employed eclectic coding (Saldaña, 2021), identified the emerging data categories, and generated themes corresponding to my research questions and the focus of my study. Moreover, I adhered to the highest standards of research ethics to ensure participant confidentiality and well-being.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. This chapter offers the findings derived from the data provided by 16 respondents who participated in the study through individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. First, the study's sample is portrayed, and participant profiles are presented. Then, the themes and sub-themes constructed from the data are described in detail and supported with participant in-vivo quotes. Finally, responses to the central research question and the four sub-questions are provided. A succinct summary of the findings concludes the chapter.

Participants

I recruited a sample of 16 expatriate teachers (ETs) living and working in China, over the age of 18, who were employed in Chinese internationalized schools (CIS) at the time of my data collection. My participants had experience with the phenomenon of work adjustment because they had been working in CIS for at least one school year. Six of them were part of a convenience sample of individuals known to me from the expatriate community, and these initial participants led me to further respondents through snowball sampling. Data collection occurred in the summer months of 2023 and was conducted entirely online.

After coding the first 10 participants' interviews and protocols, I started examining data saturation and continued sampling until all themes, sub-themes, and categories were reasonably saturated. My study included minimal participant attrition. All 16 individuals in my sample participated in individual interviews. All except Michael submitted their written protocols, and focus groups were attended by all respondents except Michael and Jane.

The participants hailed from different parts of the world and spoke English with various accents, which occasionally made proofreading the interview transcripts challenging. All respondents were proficient English speakers able to express their thoughts confidently despite minor grammatical errors typical of spontaneous speech. When using participants' in-vivo quotes, I remained faithful to the recorded responses. I only edited some of the conversation fillers (e.g., you know, I mean, like) when their occurrence made sentences too long or hard to follow.

Deductive disclosure constituted a genuine concern for many of my participants. To protect their identities as much as realistically possible in a qualitative study, I decided to remove from the participant profiles such information as my respondents' countries of origin, subjects taught (whenever possible), or cities of current residence (Sales & Folkman, 2000; Tracy, 2020). To give a clear picture of the sample without compromising participant identities, I presented my respondents' demographic data in aggregated form (see Table 1). In the absence of an official government city-tier classification in China, I used the prevalent commercial categorization (Jin & Piskunova, 2021).

In my sampling, I aimed at maximum variation to ensure my participants were as diverse as possible in terms of age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, mother tongue, level of education, teaching certification status, length of tenure, and home country teaching experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final sample showed great diversity in most aspects. Among the 16 ETs recruited for my study, all met the minimum work permit requirements for ETs in China, and many exceeded them greatly. Eight respondents held master's degrees, nine had education-related degrees, and six were in the process of obtaining advanced degrees or additional teaching credentials.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographic characteristic	Number of participants
Gender	
Male	8
Female	8
Age	
20s	2
30s	8
40s	5
50s	1
Ethnicity	
White	11
Black	2
Latino	1
Asian	1
Mixed race	1
Region of origin	
Europe	9
North America	4
South America	1
Africa	1
Asia	1
English language status	
Native speaker	7
Non-native Speaker	9
Education level	
Undergraduate	8
Graduate	8
Currently pursuing further degrees or additional credentials	6
Degree major	
Education or related to education	9
Other	7
Teaching license or qualified teacher status in home country	
Yes	9
No	7

Teaching career status	
First-career teacher	9
Career changer	7
Home country teaching experience	
Yes	9
No	7
Combined teaching experience	
Below 6 years	4
6-10 years	4
Over 10 years	8
Teaching experience in China	
Below 6 years	8
6-10 years	6
Over 10 years	2
Tenure in current school	
1 year	7
2 years	4
3 years	2
4 and more years	3
Current school location	
Southern China	9
Eastern China	6
Northern China	1
City level	
First-tier city	9
Second-tier city	7
Type of teaching position	
Homeroom teacher	7
English teacher	3
Teacher of a subject other than English	6
Age of students taught	
Kindergarten	3
Elementary school (Grades 1-6)	7
Middle school (Grades 7-9)	2
Elementary and middle school (Grades 1-9)	2
High school (Grades 9-12)	2

The sample variation mainly reflected the hiring practices within the industry, for example, the schools' apparent preference for employing ETs who are White and in their 30s (Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; C. H. Williams, 2017). Regrettably, I was unable to recruit any participants who had been working in China for less than three years, so my sample was skewed toward individuals with longer tenure in China. This limitation resulted from three-year-long COVID-19 border restrictions in China that were still in place half a year before my data collection began. Consequently, I did not find any willing participants who would be relatively new to China but would have a year of working experience in CIS at the time of my data collection.

Adam

Chinese people are very tolerant. I know that I have lots of things to learn, and because my Chinese is not so good, even if communication is challenging, nobody complains. Nobody tells me that I did this wrong, I should do that better. So, I have lots of freedom, and my leaders trust me. I don't think it would be so easy in other countries, so that's what I like here.

Adam is in his late thirties, White, and from a European country. He decided to work as a teacher in China because of his desire to utilize the knowledge he gained during his college education and because his wife is Chinese. Adam had gained qualified teacher status and some teaching experience in his home country during and shortly after college but then worked outside the field of education in several European countries. When he arrived in China five years ago, he accepted a job in a training center and then transitioned to an internationalized K-12 school in a first-tier southern city, where he has been employed for the past two years. He is very satisfied with his current position and has very few complaints.

Adam is humble about his strengths and open about his weaknesses as a teacher. He sees his job as a road to self-improvement. He appreciates the indirect way of Chinese communication because it allows him to learn at his own pace without being criticized. Adam is

not afraid to experiment and make mistakes and often lets his students do the same. When he notices communication problems in his workplace, he blames them on cultural differences and his insufficient Mandarin proficiency. Adam is sometimes tired from his long working hours but is still willing to accept additional duties or work overtime because he values his leadership and the freedom his school grants him.

Anna

If there is something bad happening with your student, look at yourself as a teacher. What are you doing wrong? So, I try to give myself feedback every single day. When the day is over, when I come home, I try to understand, OK, why is this kid still hitting others, or why is that one still not showing me any interest in the English corner? You need to understand what's wrong with you as a teacher when you see that there's something bad happening with your students.

Anna is in her mid-forties, White, and comes from a European country. She holds a degree in education, a teaching license, and a prestigious Montessori teaching qualification. She has worked as a teacher for over two decades and has experience with students of all ages. When she first came to China eight years ago, Anna already spoke some Mandarin and wanted to travel with her family. An unexpected job opportunity convinced her to stay as a teacher. During her tenure in the country, she has worked in training centers, kindergartens, and internationalized schools in different cities.

In her current institution, a high-ranking internationalized K-12 school in a second-tier southern city, Anna became a Montessori teacher in a team of local and expatriate teachers. She feels strongly about teacher professionalism, is her own worst critic, and tries to set a positive example for her students and coworkers. Anna is a reflective practitioner and believes that teachers are responsible for shaping their students. While she feels well-adjusted and in control of almost all aspects of her job, disrespectful leadership has been her frequent complaint in Chinese workplaces. However, despite the challenges of her work and life abroad, Anna is grateful for the opportunity to be in China and grow as a teacher and a human being.

Devon

You can't use a Chinese manner to manage foreigners! And the same way, you can't just use foreigners to manage Chinese people, it goes both ways. Because the way we do things is completely different. It's just a fact.

Devon is in his early thirties, Black, and comes from a country in North America. With a degree in the STEM field, he perceives himself as an educator rather than a teacher and strongly focuses on applying life skills in his classroom. Devon came to China a decade ago, attracted by the growing economy and new business opportunities. After working on several projects related to science, technology, and education, he accepted a position in an internationalized IB school in a first-tier city in southern China. He has been employed there for two years as a primary years homeroom teacher. Outside of teaching, he is also active as a tech consultant and social entrepreneur.

Devon values a friendly workplace atmosphere, a supportive community, and a work-life balance. However, he acknowledges that no country or workplace is ideal, and some discomfort always needs to be endured. He is motivated by group work, project-based learning, and student growth in and beyond the classroom. Devon views the cultural differences in his school, the challenges of collaborating with the local teachers, and his heavy workload as opportunities for growth. Although critical of some aspects of the local leadership, such as the inadequacy of local management standards for the expatriate staff, he is determined to succeed in his job.

Emily

There's some of the kids who don't really see their parents a lot. You know, if they can afford to come to my school, then they're rich, and their parents don't really care about them, basically, and they come with a driver to the school. Their parents, I don't see them around. So, I guess I'm a substitute mom for them.

Emily is in her early thirties, White, and comes from a country in North America. After obtaining a degree in a field related to education, she taught for two years in her home country

and then decided to move abroad. She chose China because the job offer she received was better than the competing offers from other Asian countries. Emily has only been employed in one institution, a prestigious internationalized school in a second-tier eastern city. She has worked there as a kindergarten teacher for the last eight years. During her time at the school, she obtained two additional teacher qualifications.

Emily is very satisfied with her school and acknowledges that the expatriate teacher turnover there has not been as high as in some other institutions. Her greatest joy is her students because she can teach them for three years and see their growth. However, Emily realizes that she sometimes serves as a substitute mom for the students whose parents do not give their children enough attention. While she enjoys the stability of her post, she also feels it might be time for her to move on. Emily is, thus, considering a career or location change.

Gabriel

So, I realized it's not about entertaining the kids, it's more about them showing you respect. Being friendly but not being their friend, staying firm and strict. I think in the beginning that was a big challenge for me because I tend to be very friendly and energetic. I had to change some of that because the same energy we give to students, we receive back from them. Of course, we can be energetic, but if we receive the same energy and don't give kids limits, they will get out of control.

Gabriel is in his early fifties, Latino, and comes from a country in South America. He has a degree in a field unrelated to education and is currently pursuing a graduate degree in education. After working in a career unrelated to education in his home country for many years, he wanted to gain international work experience. Gabriel first came to China six years ago for an internship unrelated to teaching. He decided to stay as a teacher when he realized the high demand and lucrative employment conditions for international educators. He has been employed in one large K-12 internationalized school in a first-tier southern city for five years.

Gabriel has never experienced significant adjustment challenges in China, although he is still learning to be an effective teacher. He is a reflective practitioner who cares about his professional development. The extracurricular subject he teaches offers him a welcome challenge and an opportunity to design his own curriculum. However, the insufficient English proficiency of his students has often complicated his lesson planning, and student behavior has caused him to rethink his classroom management style. Gabriel appreciates the trust and support of his leadership but laments the divide between local and expatriate faculty members.

Jane

The moment I walk into our office, it feels like there's this black hole that's sucking out all the energy, all the life. I feel like I can't even think or work or think of any great ideas. And it's because the people in our office, we don't get along. I feel like there are too many strong personalities and too many people that want to be something in the school. They want to be loved, they want to get awards, they want to get extra money for being great. Whereas I just want to do my work and I don't want anyone to bother me, I don't want anyone to compete with me.

Jane is in her late twenties, comes from an African country, and identifies as mixed race. She obtained a degree in a field related to education. After two years in a career unrelated to teaching, she saw no prospects for herself in her chosen field and her home country's economy. Jane decided to move to China four years ago and has worked as an English as a foreign language teacher in a public school, a training center, and two private schools. She has been employed at her current institution, a reputable K-12 internationalized school in a first-tier southern city, for two years.

Jane's experiences in her current place of employment have been influenced by the toxic atmosphere among the expatriate staff in her department. She feels undervalued and exploited but also realizes that she is treated unfairly because of her gender and ethnicity. Jane enjoys working with her students but sometimes feels helpless in handling classroom management challenges because the school lacks a uniform code of student conduct. She receives little help

from her local coworkers, who tend to ignore student misbehavior to avoid confrontation with the parents. Jane's survival strategy has been, in her own words, "toughening up, even if it goes against my personality."

Laura

I changed my attitude to work in that I started to be more relaxed. If you come home at the end of your working day, stop thinking about work. Work should stay at work. At home, you are not a teacher anymore, you're just a simple person who is busy with other stuff, not related to work. And yeah, of course it's helped me to feel healthier and less stressed.

Laura is in her mid-thirties, White, and from a European country. She holds a degree in education, qualified teacher status, and is currently pursuing two further teacher qualifications despite her supervisors' discouragement. In her home country, she first worked as a teacher and then became a teacher manager and business owner. The failure of her private educational center drove her to seek teaching opportunities abroad. Laura came to China seven years ago and has worked with young learners in different institutions in several Chinese cities.

Laura has been employed in her current school, an internationalized K-12 school in a second-tier southern city, for one year. She quickly gained a reputation as competent and reliable. As a former educational manager, she tries to be rational in her work attitude and accurate in her observations. Laura realizes the strengths and weaknesses of a workplace and strives to make her work environment more efficient. She cares about teamwork, a healthy workplace atmosphere, and work-life balance. In her current school, her team leader often seeks her opinions and advice, but the school management does not welcome Laura's constructive criticism.

Lily

In the beginning, I didn't want to use the school's Class Dojo classroom management system because I like the ideas of Positive Discipline. So, for me, giving rewards and punishments to kids is a terrible thing. But, unfortunately, here in China, because of the cultural background, this kind of management works...

Lily is in her early forties, White, and comes from a European country where she obtained a degree in education and qualified teacher status. With over two decades of work experience, Lily taught different subjects to young learners and worked in a leadership role. She first came to China seven years ago for a short-term scholarship to learn Mandarin but returned two years later to teach. She now has a Chinese husband and a young child. Lily has worked for three years at her current institution, a prestigious K-12 internationalized school in a first-tier eastern city.

Although Lily successfully adapted to the local work culture emphasizing hierarchy and seniority, she realizes that Chinese schools' working hours and teaching load are much higher than those in her home country. She understands that the local work ethic can be challenging for expatriates and that Chinese companies often disregard employee rights. Lily values her team, cares for the relationships with both local and expatriate teachers, and prefers to deal with problems internally. She understands that her job as an expatriate educator is not only about teaching but also about presentation. To meet the expectations of her role, Lily had to give up on her preferred classroom management system and accept a discipline approach that contradicts her educational beliefs.

Martha

I would like to be a real partner with the Chinese teachers and leaders. Because you know, the Chinese love their subject meetings, but we're excluded from that! They say it's because of the language barrier, but some of us expat teachers can speak Chinese!

Martha is in her late forties, White, and from a European country. She holds a degree in education, qualified teacher status, and a degree in another field. She has nearly three decades of diverse work experience and taught in public schools in her home country for several years before switching to a corporate career and remaining a part-time tutor. Coming to China eight years ago allowed Martha to explore a new culture and return to full-time teaching. She is fluent

in Mandarin and socially active in many expatriate and local circles. Martha's current school, where she has worked for one year, is an aspiring but less prestigious internationalized K-12 school in a first-tier city in southern China.

Martha has a strong commitment to her students and cares about teacher accountability, work ethics, and educational equality. She wants to offer her learners a world-class education and spares no effort to change the prevailing view of expatriate teachers as unqualified and lazy. She enjoyed teaching in Chinese public schools for a few years, but the recent budget cuts in the city where she lives forced her to look for a position in an internationalized school. In her current place of employment, she has struggled with the role of a school mascot, or in her own words, "merely decoration." Martha's sense of duty and assertiveness have complicated her relationships with some local teachers.

Michael

This past year, a lot of kids started claiming I didn't correct their homework. That's a bald-faced lie because they weren't even doing their homework. So, I started sending pictures to their parents of the kids physically putting their homework into their backpacks, because, at that point, kids can't lie.

Michael is in his late twenties, White, and comes from a country in North America. He holds a degree in a field unrelated to education. After feeling burned out in his chosen career, he saw teaching abroad as a new start or, in his own words, "a reset button." When he arrived in China six years ago, Michael taught English in a training center and a public school. He briefly returned to his home country during the COVID-19 pandemic to obtain a teaching license. With his new teaching credential, he returned to China and sought a homeroom teacher position in a prestigious internationalized K-12 school in a large northern city. Besides his teaching, Michael is developing a business idea that would allow him to resign from his teaching position soon.

Michael's school recently experienced a significant leadership shift from Western- to Chinese-style. It caused a deterioration of expatriate employees' working conditions and led to frustration among the staff because some privileges were revoked. While Michael is critical of the school's local leadership, he feels supported by his expatriate coordinator and coworkers, whom he often consults about his teaching methods. He feels immune to minor job distress and has learned to appreciate the consistency and stability of his employment. In his three years in the current school, Michael has developed strategies for dealing with student motivation and behavior, parental complaints, and supervisor expectations.

Nicole

I could see how I was being treated compared to how others were being treated. I could see how I've put even more effort than anyone else, but other teachers could brag about how they are mediocre teachers and brag about how they can do the bare minimum and not be micromanaged because they're the right color. Basically, if you're Black or Brown, the school doesn't keep you long. If you look at their hiring record for the past five years, you'll see that I'm not bluffing.

Nicole is in her late forties, Black, and comes from a country in North America. With a degree in a field unrelated to education, she spent half her working life in military service in her home country and overseas placements. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in education. Nicole came to China twelve years ago and has worked in numerous educational institutions in five cities. She still maintains close relationships with some of her past students. At the time of the interview, she was employed at a high-ranking internationalized K-12 school in a second-tier southern city.

Before her current employment, Nicole spent six years in a school that she loved but decided to switch jobs in pursuit of a higher salary. The financial difference mattered because, besides her work in China, Nicole is involved in a school-building project in a disadvantaged part of the world. The school change turned out to be a traumatic experience for her and her young son. After a year of disrespectful treatment and discrimination, the school terminated

Nicole's contract without a reason, acknowledging that she had been an emergency hire. Despite this distressing experience, Nicole speaks positively about her employment in China and believes her efforts make a difference in students' lives.

Oliver

Being open, sharing opinions, expressing feelings about something, these are alien concepts for many students when they join the school. Because they're not often required to express how they feel or have an opinion. But I think I've had to change and adapt to understand that as a cultural thing. I just stop myself thinking that their way is wrong. Their way is different, and I could maybe also learn something from it.

Oliver is in his early thirties, White, and from a European country. After working in a field unrelated to education for several years, he became an English as a second language teacher and obtained an international teaching credential and a degree in education. Oliver started his teaching career in another Asian country and came to China eight years ago, enticed by Chinese people's serious attitude to education. He has a decade of teaching experience in various contexts. Beyond his teaching duties, he currently serves as a subject team leader in his school, a reputable internationalized K-12 school in a second-tier eastern city.

Oliver sees teaching abroad as a self-selected challenge. His attitude to working in China is one of curiosity and acceptance, and he avoids right-or-wrong comparisons between Chinese and Western culture and educational philosophies. Despite his ambivalent feelings about the amount of homework and his students' grueling schedules, he enjoys working both with students who want to learn and those who are initially unmotivated. When he acts as a mediator between his team and the senior management, Oliver focuses on constructive solutions and improving work efficiency.

Sara

I don't feel that I'm a person to them. They don't care about how I feel. So, that's why I don't expect the school to support me in any way. They support me by giving me money, and they think that is enough. OK, we pay you a lot, so you have to do anything we say, and we don't care how you feel about it. They don't care.

Sara is in her mid-forties, White, and comes from a European country. She holds a degree in education, qualified teacher status, and has worked in coaching and education for 25 years.

After two decades of teaching in her home country, she sought job opportunities abroad to travel and experience new cultures. Sara moved to China four years ago and has worked in three internationalized schools in three cities. She has been employed at her current institution, a reputable internationalized K-12 school in a first-tier eastern city, for one year. She only decided to stay for another year after the management met some of her demands.

Sara sees her relationships with the students as the most important and motivating factor in her job, but she also enjoys the support of her competent expatriate coworkers. On the one hand, her current job allowed her to teach a new subject, a shift that she embraced with curiosity and excitement. On the other hand, she has struggled with numerous duties beyond her previous teaching experience, and the heavy workload affected her mental state. Unfortunately, her leadership remained indifferent to her calls for help until the end of the school year. Sara is skeptical about the Chinese private education sector. She believes schools rarely care about expatriate teachers' well-being and hire foreigners only to justify their high tuition fees to students' parents.

Stefan

You know, in bilingual international schools, the parents are paying, and students are perfect for everyone except the teachers. And you have to accept they're perfect, yeah, that's the thing. If they are misbehaving, you should find a solution yourself. The school doesn't have any kind of system.

Stefan is in his mid-thirties, White, and comes from a European country where he obtained a degree in education and a teaching license. He is currently pursuing another degree in a field related to education. After a short visit to China six years ago, Stefan decided to return two years later because he could not secure a permanent teaching position back home. He has worked in three internationalized schools in three different cities. Stefan has been employed at his current institution, a newly founded K-12 internationalized school in a second-tier eastern city, for one year.

Stefan enjoys the impressive facilities at his school and the opportunity to work in an international environment. He is prepared for the cultural differences at his workplace and ready to accept the local ways. Although he acknowledges the poor organization, inefficient communication, and insufficient English proficiency at his school, he is forgiving about these problems because his institution is new. Stefan's biggest complaints are the lack of a school-wide discipline system and the leadership's focus on pleasing the students and their parents at any cost.

Thomas

So, my country's classroom management is very different to that in China. I have seen Chinese staff members do things that I feel are incredibly inappropriate and would call for a disciplinary in my country. I think that there is a huge cultural disconnect here. Some things the Chinese teachers do could be considered wildly inappropriate and open the school up to massive liabilities.

Thomas is in his mid-thirties, White, and from a European country. He is fluent in Mandarin and has a good understanding of the local culture. He first arrived in China straight after graduating from high school, attracted by the enormous economic growth of that time. When he realized the potential in the Chinese education sector, Thomas chose a college major close to education and subsequently obtained qualified teacher status in his home country. He

now has a decade of teaching experience and welcomes opportunities to teach new subjects and adapt his instructional methods to his students' needs.

Thomas has worked in his current institution, a small, elite internationalized school in a second-tier eastern city, for five years. He teaches an international curriculum and prepares his students for university placements abroad. Thomas enjoys the respect teachers are afforded in China and the diligent attitude most of his students display. However, he acknowledges the disconnect between local and Western teaching and disciplining methods. Thomas notices some dissatisfying aspects of the local leadership style and the inefficiency of intercultural communication in Chinese workplaces.

William

I was surprised how much misunderstanding there was between the local teachers and the international teachers. From my personal experience and my personal cultural background, I'm able to understand both sides, and I decided to try to bridge things up.

William is in his mid-thirties, ethnically Chinese, and comes from an English-speaking country in Asia. He obtained a degree in a field unrelated to education but decided to pursue a teaching career because he enjoyed tutoring during college. He now has over a decade of teaching experience in different settings. William taught in training institutions in his home country for several years and accepted his first teaching position in China four years ago. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he engaged in short-term teaching positions in different Chinese cities.

When faced with an unsatisfactory work environment, William used to switch jobs rather than try to amend the existing environment. His approach changed in his current place of employment, which is an internationalized K-12 school in a first-tier southern city. He appreciates the satisfying school facilities and his qualified coworkers. As a homeroom teacher, William enjoys the change he observes in his students but wishes the parents saw teachers as allies rather than merely service providers. Moreover, he acknowledges the lack of understanding

and effective communication between the Chinese management and the expatriate teachers. Because of his cultural background and ability to understand Chinese and Western culture, William has often serves as a mediator between local and expatriate staff members.

Results

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. The findings were based on individual interview transcripts, my participants' written protocols, and focus group transcripts that amounted to over 600 standard pages of text. I followed the hermeneutic circle of inquiry and considered parts of the phenomenon of work adjustment as experienced by my participants to understand the phenomenon in its entirety (Crowther & Thomson, 2020, 2023). I coded the interview transcripts and written protocols inductively in Atlas.TI and then ordered the codes into categories (Saldaña, 2021). An emergent coding sourcebook developed as my data analysis and synthesis progressed, so I was able to code the focus group transcripts deductively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

When theming my data, I reexamined my code categories and began arranging them in various ways, which led me to two competing sets of themes. I employed free imaginative variation to validate the necessity of individual themes for the essence of the phenomenon. I settled on the theme set that was best aligned with my research questions, the purpose of the study, and its theoretical framework (van Manen, 1990). The final set included four major themes, each containing two or three sub-themes. An overview of the themes is presented in Table 2, followed by a detailed discussion of each theme and sub-theme.

Table 2

Overview of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Code Categories

Theme	Sub-theme	Code category
Discovering what lies behind the façade	It is all about the money	Impressive facilities Saving on the cost Low quality The customer is always right Expatriate teachers for show
	The price of a high salary	Draining workloads Impeded career mobility
Trying to be a real teacher	Struggling with the imposed role	Schools' expectations of expatriate teachers Dealing with the imposed role
	Adjusting to teaching in Chinese internationalized schools	Teaching a mixed curriculum Teaching alongside the local teachers Expatriate teachers' approaches to teaching in Chinese internationalized schools Growing as a teacher
Navigating relationships with the paying customers	Relationships with students	Understanding the students Dealing with the students
	Struggling with classroom management	Looking for the roots of misbehavior Changing classroom management practices
	Relationships with the parents	Negative experiences with the parents Positive experiences with the parents Interacting with the parents
Trying to function in a multicultural work environment	Relationships with the management	Expatriate teachers' perceptions of the management Indirect contact

	Negative experiences with the management
	Positive experiences with the management
Relationships with other teachers	Relationships with the local teachers
	Strategies for dealing with the local teachers
	Relationships with other expatriate teachers
Being part of a diverse workplace	Struggling with the work culture
	Workplace atmosphere
	Barriers to communication
	Meetings
	Strategies for survival in a diverse workplace

Discovering What Lies Behind the Façade

I honestly went there with an open mind, open heart. You know, a new place, a new beautiful place, right? And then the reality inside...

-Martha

The first theme differed from the remaining three. It was based on participant experiences, observations, and complaints, but few mentions of actual adjustment strategies attempted by ETs appeared. I placed this theme first because it paints a general picture of CIS as perceived by my participants. Regardless of their backgrounds and experiences, my coinvestigators struggled to accept and adjust to the reality behind the carefully crafted image or, in Nicole's words, "beautiful façade." The school reality often involved dedication to profit rather than quality, focus on customer service, and a diminished role of ETs. My participants' salaries appeared generous, but most quickly realized their compensation came at the price of high workloads and impeded career mobility.

It Is All About the Money

Some of my participants called their schools ATMs or money-making/money-printing machines. They understood and accepted that any business, including a private school, relies on profit. However, most of my participants seemed to share Thomas's opinion that "the level to which these [Chinese internationalized] schools focus on profit is borderline predatory." My coinvestigators lamented and were sometimes repulsed by their schools' dedication to maximizing revenue at the expense of educational quality, which, in Michael's angry words, "is a very frustrating thing because they [the schools] don't give a shit about their education, they just wanna see money being made."

Impressive Facilities. My participants mentioned that their companies spared no effort to create a remarkable image. First impressions were crucial in CIS because prospective customers, the students and their parents, often judged a school based on graphic materials and a short introductory tour. Most of my coinvestigators emphasized their schools' large and impressive campuses, even if the schools' locations were sometimes remote or even rural. Lily was impressed with how many well-equipped subject classrooms her school had, and Sara appreciated the access to a modern teaching area without any desks and chairs. Adam valued having his own space on campus "because it's very condensed place here [in China], so every square meter is like gold, very precious."

Saving on the Cost. The focus on profit in my participants' schools was evident when the exorbitant tuition fees and the constant struggle to keep high enrollment numbers were contrasted with the schools' attempts to limit spendings. My participants mentioned their schools' tendency to hire many young, inexperienced, and thus cheap local teachers, not employing enough support staff, and above all, engaging current employees in any possible way

because, in Devon's words, "they want you to keep working, and they want to save more on the cost." As Thomas observed, some CIS "cut corners wherever they can. They're not willing to spend money on small things, like posters or books for the library." Three participants mentioned having to pay for teaching materials with their own money.

Low Quality. Contrary to the image sold to prospective customers, most of my coinvestigators perceived the teaching quality in their schools as poor. Educational expertise seemed lacking because the schools hired many inexperienced teachers, assigned teaching duties beyond teachers' qualifications, suffered from high staff rotation, and disregarded ET input. Emily mentioned the struggles between local and Western educational philosophies: "I feel like our, my school, is struggling with their identity." She then explained: "Like, they want to be international, but they're not because they still have the Chinese mindset about things and how they're done to appease the Chinese investors and the board and some parents." Furthermore, student attrition, the lack of consistency caused by frequent management and policy changes, and the fact that the schools were often visited and evaluated by the local authorities seemed to confirm to my participants the low instructional quality of their schools.

The Customer is Always Right. Another aspect of working in CIS that required an adjustment or a mental shift for most of my respondents was the strong position of the paying customers: the students and their parents. Nicole admitted that "usually, parents hold a lot of power," and Michael did not mince words when saying that his management was "scared shitless of the parents and kids" who "feel like they run the school." As William noticed, "teachers are being treated as service providers," which stood in stark contrast to the level of respect usually afforded to teachers in Chinese public schools. In CIS, teachers might be expected to provide the

parents only with flattering feedback about their children's performance, and grades might have to be "improved," as Stefan confessed.

Expatriate Teachers for Show. An expatriate teacher is a troublesome and expensive hire for CIS but a worthy investment because, as Sara observed, some schools "need foreign faces to give a higher fee." ETs are often requested to appear prominently in school advertising materials or any context parents are likely to notice (e.g., morning school gate duty, ceremonies, sports events). Some, like Martha, saw their role as "merely decoration" because they felt objectified and not treated as real teachers, a topic that will be discussed in detail in another section. Furthermore, many of my participants agreed that their teaching was just for show. Lily emphasized that her work involved "preparing a performance with kids," and Devon mentioned the common practice of organizing demonstration classes for prospective students and their parents that are "marketing classes, not really teaching." Sara also admitted that some subjects taught by ETs were scheduled "just to fill up the curriculum and [offer] presentation to the parents."

The Price of a High Salary

The compensation and benefits packages in my participants' schools appeared very competitive, the usual class sizes were smaller than in Chinese public schools, and the facilities and equipment looked impressive. However, the generous pay and certain comforts of teaching in private schools came at a very high price. The salaries were part of the façade because they only appeared generous until the high workloads, unpredictable teaching assignments, diminished professional role, and impeded career mobility were realized. Some aspects of employment in CIS required a mental shift and caused bitter disappointments to my participants.

Draining Workloads. Teachers in CIS are usually expected to work from 7:30-8:00 a.m. to 5:00-5:30 p.m., with a lunch break of varying length in the middle. These long hours were an adjustment for many of my participants. Some mentioned that their lunch breaks were barely enough to finish lunch or that their office hours were insufficient to prepare all their lessons. Laura described her long workday: “Our working time is 9.5 hours every day, and we don’t have a one-hour break. And on Mondays, we have meetings for one hour at the end of the day, so we work 10.5 hours. And again, no break!” Adam mentioned working on weekends because of his school’s frequent promotional activities: “You know, open classes is that we have to sometimes come on Saturday and welcome new students who eventually will start in our school next year or something like that, to spread good name and good advertisement about school.”

Most of my participants admitted feeling exhausted at work and often long after work because of their high teaching loads, usually around 20 classes a week, and the additional duties beyond teaching. For example, Lily mentioned the time-consuming supervision duties that reduced her break time or office hours: “We have four duties every week, like, during playtime or during lunch. We have to watch the kids.” Those of my coinvestigators who did not work as homeroom teachers felt mentally drained because they saw many groups of students only once a week. Adam reported seeing around 300 students every week, Lily mentioned more than 500 a week, and Gabriel taught around 500 students, some of whom he only saw once in two weeks. Some respondents confessed that they had to teach multiple subjects, often without the necessary qualifications or expertise, which added to their class preparation time. An unclear job description and changing teaching assignments were common, as reported by Devon: “They told me that I’m coming to teach English. Now I’m doing math, now I’m doing science, now I gotta do projects... Like, how do we actually know that I have those skills?”

Impeded Career Mobility. The contracts and employment conditions in my participants' school were often, in Devon's words, "a little shaky." The schools might include unlawful clauses in labor contracts or break the law when dealing with employees who want to resign because many ETs in China are unaware of their rights, and the available legal protections are insufficient. Despite the booming job market for ETs, leaving a position, especially in the middle of a contract, was notoriously difficult for my respondents. Thomas explained, "The school can lord over us essentially with no punishment because we need a release letter to go to our next job." Although most of my participants changed jobs successfully several times, some have postponed their career mobility for years because of the risks involved.

Although the carefully crafted school image and the generous employment packages in many CIS seem alluring, my participants had no doubt that they were, in Nicole's words, "a beautiful façade." Behind this façade often lay deception, exploitation, and dedication to profit at the expense of teaching quality and employee well-being. ETs can expect a high salary, but it might come at the price of a heavy workload, unpredictable teaching assignments, and impeded career mobility. Moreover, my coinvestigators noted that ETs were often used as marketing tools without much instructional value and were sometimes employed merely to justify the high tuition fees.

Trying to be a Real Teacher

So, I just showed them that I'm a teacher as well, and I have a serious attitude to my work. That I'm responsible, and yeah, they should consider me as well.

-Laura

The second theme reflected my participants' struggles to be recognized as real teachers. The respondents tried to balance their schools' expectations, their convictions about a teacher's

role, and their desire to be recognized as competent educators. The theme included two sub-themes: struggling with the imposed role and adjusting to teaching in CIS.

Struggling with the Imposed Role

Regardless of their levels of self-efficacy, all my participants were confronted with the prevailing beliefs about ETs in China. Martha lamented the widespread view that ETs were not real teachers. She said, “Of course, for some, we are not teachers, we are... decoration, right? Entertainment.” ETs might also be suspected of not showing a serious attitude toward work, a notion some of my participants confirmed. For example, William had met expatriates who should not have been allowed to teach: “There are many of them that I can hardly call teachers. I can hardly call them decent people. Like, they’re just backpackers from God knows where. And then they just, yeah, they just started teaching.”

Schools’ Expectations of Expatriate Teachers. In response to the prevailing beliefs about ETs in China and their decorative role in CIS, some of my participants’ schools expected no expertise or real teaching from their international educators. For example, Martha was openly requested by her supervisors to “lower the academic level” of her lessons. Gabriel noticed that his school did not genuinely care about his teaching quality: “Sometimes they care more about superficial things. And of course, you want to provide quality education, but at the same, you notice how superficial they want you to act when you’re teaching.” Stefan also admitted that “paperwork should be good because someone will check it sometimes, maybe, but what exactly I gonna do in the class, they didn’t care about that.”

Dealing with the Imposed Role. My participants responded to the expectations their school had of ETs in varying ways. Some stayed true to their beliefs and standards or showed

initiative. Others tried to change their mindsets and expectations or simply gave up on putting any effort.

Staying True to One's Beliefs and Standards. The first strategy was chiefly mentioned by those respondents who had teaching experience in their home countries, clear expectations of a teacher's role, and high professional standards. They attempted to guard their reputations, appear professional, adhere to teacher ethics and high work standards, set a positive example to others, do quality work, and follow an inner sense of duty. Anna explained why she never surrendered to her school's low standards: "I have a reputation of being a professional teacher so I cannot, you know, behave in a different way. I have to be always up to the standard." Several participants insisted on preserving a work-life balance and opposed the local habit of working long hours. For example, Oliver said, "I think some people take their work too seriously or devote themselves to it too much, in an almost unhealthy kind of fashion."

Showing Initiative. The participants who displayed high self-efficacy and attachment to professional standards often showed initiative, compared their situations to other schools in China or their home countries, and looked for solutions to their problems. For example, Martha fought to enforce homework for her subject despite her school's policy allowing only LTs to assign homework. Michael began documenting everything in his class to ensure that "kids can't lie to their parents." Anna did not hesitate to speak her mind in meetings when she disagreed with her supervisors. She said, "Yeah, sometimes when there is injustice happening...Because I'm an injustice fighter in my life. If there is an injustice happening and someone needs to be put in his place or in her place, I will do that."

Trying to Change One's Mindset and Expectations. Several of my coinvestigators mentioned striving to control their negative emotions. Jane described her attempts to stay

positive about her work: “I need to really check myself because I feel like sometimes, I can become really negative.” Anna, who is a perfectionist and her own worst critic, understood that “an error at work is not a life-or-death situation.” Some showed determination to make things work despite the challenges and focused on their mental health and personal well-being. For example, Laura found it helpful “not to be so emotional, relax more, [and] try to have more rest.” Adam adopted a local way to stay healthy. He wrote in his protocol: “Another piece of advice that is very useful and that I learned here in China is to drink warm water regularly and take regular naps during the day.”

Letting Go. The last strategy that some of my participants employed to deal with their roles in CIS included accepting things as they were, doing the bare minimum, not identifying with the school, and staying on the job merely for convenience. For example, Devon accepted that some aspects of his job could not be changed: “So yeah, you know, sometimes you gotta understand that you need to let go, right? ‘Cause you don’t control some stuff. So, as much as you actually want to change them, you cannot.” A few respondents admitted that their expectations got much lower after a few years in China. Anna confessed: “Actually, to make me shocked [now], it should be something really terrible.” Moreover, some of my coinvestigators acknowledged that they only stayed at their schools for convenience. For example, one participant confessed that they renewed their contract only to avoid the lengthy process of transferring the work permit to a new employer, which would hinder their summer plans. Another participant shared: “It’s not really my school. It’s just a place I work at now to pay the bills.”

Adjusting to Teaching in Chinese Internationalized Schools

My participants mentioned that their jobs required numerous instructional adjustments. They struggled with the mixed curricula, the cooperation with LTs, and the insufficient in-service training. In response to these challenges, they developed different strategies to approach their teaching and professional development.

Teaching a Mixed Curriculum. Because my participants' students were primarily local children, the schools had to implement the government-mandated curriculum. However, international curricula like the International Baccalaureate, General Certificate of Secondary Education, and A Levels attracted the paying customers to my respondents' schools. Some considered the blend of local and international curricula confusing, as explained by Stefan: "Two different things, but completely different things, cannot be good in the end." Devon confessed that "sometimes there's a clash of ideology." One participant admitted their inability to cover some gender-related themes included in their British curriculum "because of the political environment being quite, well, we all know what."

Consequently, the subjects and content matter contained in the international curricula often became second-rank or marginal. Several participants mentioned that their schools had no curriculum for their subjects, or the provided curriculum turned out vague and unaccompanied by textbooks or teaching materials. Sara explained her situation: "I got scope and sequence, so, in general, brief curriculum, and I have to build up topics and of course lesson plans around those areas. So, yeah, I'm left alone." For many, designing a new curriculum was time-consuming and required considerable research, as explained by Adam: "The challenging part is that I have to do lots of research, spend long time to do some research for different information

and different ideas.” Martha admitted that she envied the LTs who “have everything: government books, PPTs, videos.”

Teaching Alongside the Local Teachers. Some of my respondents were employed in homeroom teacher positions. However, contrary to their expectations, they did not work independently with their classes of students but merely supported the local homeroom teachers who led the classes and communicated with the students’ parents. The learners received their whole Chinese curriculum from a local homeroom teacher, except for specialized subjects like music and art taught by specialists. The expatriate homeroom teachers were only responsible for teaching the international curricular component but could not plan it independently. Collaborative, transdisciplinary unit and lesson planning was common, with LTs in leading roles. Devon mentioned the difficulty of compromising with his Chinese teaching partner because “sometimes it feels like a competition.”

All participants noticed the differences in LTs’ and ETs’ teaching styles and educational philosophies. Most agreed that local teaching appeared devoid of interpretation and focused on lecturing, test preparation, and textbook memorization. William compared the approaches he and his expatriate coworkers preferred to those of the LTs: “His [expatriate coworker’s] focus will be on, can I keep it interesting enough? Now, for me, it’s, can I get students to apply whatever they do here to their real-life experience?” He concluded, “And to the Chinese teachers, their focus will always be, can they answer this question in an exam?” Thomas complained about the lack of interpretation in LTs’ classrooms: “When they’re preparing materials for the students, they will use the ebook, highlight passages they think are important, and then print that off and give that to the students. Which I don’t see is particularly helpful to the students.” Martha also observed that “Chinese teachers only teach from [text]books, they read books and do exercises.”

Expatriate Teachers' Approaches to Teaching in CIS. My participants noticed that Chinese education valued compliance over creativity and was usually teacher-, textbook-, and exam-centered, so local students were rarely used to interpreting information or speaking publicly. Some respondents rejected the instructional methods suggested by their local coworkers and relied on teaching approaches familiar to them from their own schooling, teacher preparation programs, and teaching practice back home. However, a few participants began tuning in to their students' needs or tried adapting to the local ways.

Rejecting the Local Ways. Many of my participants opposed the local teaching methods and preferred fun, active, and individualized methods focused on twenty-first-century skills and teaching students to think independently. Jane remembered the first days at her school when her LTs advised her to organize her classes the way she described as “military style.” After two weeks of struggling, she returned to her preferred, fun teaching style because she realized that “the kids don't really enjoy what I'm doing, and even me, I feel uncomfortable walking to the class, delivering a lesson that I know is not what I do.” Other participants agreed they tried to be fun teachers because enjoyable lessons led to student learning. For instance, Adam gave an example of a lesson beyond the classroom walls: “We went outside, and I told them [the students] to collect leaves from different parts of the campus. ... And then we came back to class, and we did prints.”

Tuning in to Student Needs. Some of my participants saw it as challenging to employ Western and nontraditional teaching methods with students used to a teacher- and textbook-centered classrooms. Oliver mentioned that “being open, sharing opinions, expressing feelings about something, these are alien concepts for many students when they join the school.” Therefore, many of my coinvestigators became mindful of their students' preferred learning

styles and tuned in to their learners' needs. For example, Thomas explained that he individualized his instruction, and Michael spoke of using group work in his classes. When she realized that many of her young students needed help focusing, Anna decided to introduce "a lot of subjects that have never been taught in this kindergarten before, like mindfulness, breathing practices, yoga." Lily mentioned observing her students and adjusting her teaching: "If I'm planning to make a game, I have to start from a very basic variant of the game and then, if I see that kids can do it, I tell them, OK, we upgrade the game."

Adapting to the Local Ways. A few participants changed their teaching approaches and even relinquished their firm convictions after realizing that Western methods did not necessarily work well with their Chinese students. Lily was an excellent example of adjusting to the local ways. Once an eager proponent of Positive Discipline, she confessed in her interview: "So, for me, giving rewards and punishments to kids is a terrible thing. But, unfortunately, here in China, because of the cultural background, this kind of management works..." She also started using PowerPoint presentations, a teaching tool common in Chinese schools but less popular in Lily's home country. Moreover, a few participants noted that including Mandarin translation in their classes helped the students understand difficult content and improved classroom discipline.

Growing as a Teacher. Evolving as a teacher was a frequent topic in my participants' interviews, but most were dissatisfied with the professional development offered in their schools. Martha mentioned that all training at her school was intended for the LTs and that "foreigners were excluded." Thomas admitted that "there's very little training available for my subject." Gabriel lamented that any training at his school lacked outside expertise, and "most of the trainers are colleagues from the school." The usual method of professional learning employed in schools, class observations, was also disappointing for some. Jane complained, "The advice they

[local coworkers] give you, it doesn't even make sense. There's no logic behind it, there's no real purpose why they wanted this way, or why they want you to add something or change something to your lesson."

Most of my participants took professional development into their own hands. Besides obtaining advanced degrees and professional credentials, some mentioned learning for the job and gaining new expertise to meet the requirements of their positions. Several participants researched effective ways to teach and deal with problem students. Michael, who saw himself as "not the most decorative guy," used online resources to learn "how to eat up space and decorate my classroom efficiently." Moreover, many respondents mentioned reflecting on their teaching practices. For example, Anna said, "I tried to give myself feedback every single day."

Becoming a better teacher was an achievement many of my coinvestigators felt proud of. Jane, Gabriel, and Adam, all in their fifth year of teaching, frequently mentioned how much they still had to learn. However, all of them also noted the progress they saw themselves making over the years and the mistakes they learned from. Jane said, "And even if it [the lesson] fails because my ideas don't always work, but even if it fails, OK, you've learned something. If it works, at least you know this thing works." Some, like Nicole, regretted being "stuck in a comfort zone for too long" and not prioritizing obtaining advanced degrees and teaching licenses earlier in life.

My coinvestigators tried to be real teachers in a very challenging work environment. The role imposed on them was determined by stereotypes and often amounted to being school mascots or, in Martha's words, "merely decoration," rather than real teachers. The participants responded to their employers' expectations by staying true to their beliefs and standards, showing initiative, trying to change their mindsets and expectations, or letting go. The challenges of teaching in CIS involved struggles with the mixed curriculum and working alongside the LTs.

The instructional adjustments employed by my coinvestigators included rejecting the local ways, tuning in to student needs, and adapting to the local ways. Many of my participants cared deeply about their professional development and felt proud of their progress over the years.

Navigating Relationships with the Paying Customers

So, they're thinking, I'm paying big money here, so I'm expecting top-notch services.
-William

The third theme captured my participants' perceptions of their relationships with the paying customers in CIS: the students and their parents. These relationships were influenced by cultural differences, language barriers, and sometimes unreasonable expectations. The children studying in my respondents' schools tended to be boarding students who only saw their guardians on weekends and posed unique discipline problems. Their parents' expectations often reflected an attitude Anna described as, "We pay you money, so it's your job to bring up our child."

Relationships with Students

Most of my respondents genuinely enjoyed their students and were motivated by their growth. For Jane, working with the kids was "the least stressful thing about the job," and Emily also admitted, "I'm in it for them." Like many others, William enjoyed witnessing the progress made by his learners and "seeing that they started doing things that they couldn't do, or they didn't dare to." Some emphasized that their students were high achievers and, in Oliver's words, "really push themselves and are well supported by their families." Emily mentioned feeling like a substitute mom for her students because she "spent more time with them than their parents."

The experiences my participants had with their students' English proficiency were mixed. Michael appreciated his learners' English level: "I can actually have conversations. I get a little bit of a mental workout more often now with the kids." Sara confessed that "some of them speak

better than me.” However, most other respondents saw their learner’s proficiency as insufficient, particularly in the early grades. Gabriel noticed “the English level gap,” and Adam admitted that the “English level of the students, especially for Grade 1 and 2, it’s not good enough.”

Understanding the Students. My participants gave many examples of rich, spoiled, and disrespectful students who enjoyed impunity at their schools. Michael felt his learners received “zero consequences” because their parents paid high tuition fees. Nicole spoke of “VIP students” who “almost get away with murder” without ever being reprimanded. Anna linked student impunity in her school to a lax school policy that “doesn’t state at all that if the kid performs acts of violence, and if it is repeatedly done during these and these period of time, then the kid can be, for example, suspended from the school or dismissed.”

However, most respondents did not blame their students for the misbehavior. Nicole admitted, “It’s not even really their [the kids’] fault, it’s really the parents.” Some admitted that many of their learners, even as young as Grade 1, were boarding students who, in Jane’s words, “have no parents looking after them from Monday to Friday.” My coinvestigators also understood that Chinese students were overloaded with school assignments. Lily noted that her learners “don’t have breaks between classes, they have only one break in the morning for snack, one for lunch, and one short break for another snack in the afternoon.” Adam also observed that after school, “kids are packed with different kinds of activities and are pushed by school, by teachers, by parents a lot.”

Dealing with the Students. Maintaining a good relationship with the students was an important goal for most of my participants. Jane stated, “It’s really nice working with the little kids. Some of them, you really form a close bond with them.” My respondents tried to build and

maintain rapport with their learners by using incentives, trying to remember student names, and getting more sensitive about their students.

Using Incentives. My participants' methods of rewarding hard work and winning student affection differed. For example, Michael discovered that candy "motivates the hell out of kids" and started using it as an incentive in every class. Stefan learned that the students worked more diligently if promised "15 or 20 minutes to play at the end of the lesson." To reward the children's work at the end of the school year, Martha "prepared personalized certificates and bought small educational gifts" for the best students in each of her 11 classes. She paid for the certificates and the gifts with her own money.

Remembering Names. Because many of my respondents saw large numbers of students only once a week, remembering student names constituted a significant challenge to building and maintaining rapport. Martha, who taught over 200 students a week, tried "to understand and to remember as many students as possible." Lily told her learners openly: "I teach every week more than 500 students. And I will remember your face, I will remember your behavior and yourself, but don't ask me about remembering your name, because it's not possible." Gabriel, who taught around 500 students and saw some of them once in two weeks, employed a creative way to use student names in his lessons: "I made a card for every single kid. So, I bring my cards from every class to the classroom, and I stick it on the board. Actually, I make this map, classroom map, in the whiteboard."

Getting More Sensitive About Students. A few participants mentioned becoming more sensitive about their learners' feelings. For example, Devon learned "to talk more [to the students] and just understand where they're coming from" rather than taking immediate action. Michael noticed that not all jokes were appropriate in his classroom and "stopped doing that

[joking] as much ‘cause I’ve learned these kids are pretty soft.” Sara observed that her students became more attached to her during a school trip. She said: “I was teacher, but at the time I make a lot of jokes with them, ask not-official questions, share about my personal life, some small parts. And they start to realize that I’m not teacher, I’m a human being.” Anna confirmed that opening up to students was important. She said, “Sharing, relating stories about yourself from time to time helps transform [you] into human being that students can relate to.”

Struggling with Classroom Management

The two of my participants who worked with high school students reported no discipline problems, as emphasized by Thomas: “The students are very respectful, polite, like, classroom management’s essentially zero.” In contrast, discipline struggles recurred in the accounts of most who worked with kindergarten, elementary, and middle school students. William admitted, “The general expectation that the students had of expat teachers is that they’re much more relaxed compared to our local teachers.” My respondents adjusted by looking for the roots of student misbehavior and changing their classroom management practices.

Looking for the Roots of Misbehavior. My coinvestigators reported many examples of student misbehavior and lack of restraint and offered differing explanations for their origins. Many blamed uncontrollable behaviors on the lack of school-wide classroom management systems in their institutions. Stefan noted the inconsistencies in disciplining practices among the teachers in his school: “And the problem is, let’s say, I have my rules, other teacher have other rules, third teacher have their rules, and that’s difficult for kids even, to adjust every time.” In some schools, a discipline system existed but was not enforced, as described by Jane: “Even if they create a system for discipline, nobody follows through with it. It almost stops at the homeroom teacher and then nothing happens.”

Lily opined that the frequent student misbehavior in her classes resulted from the usual dynamics of the Chinese classroom: “Kids, they are really stressed, and when you give them time and opportunity to have some fun and be relaxed, they are too relaxed, and they cannot stop.” LTs’ lack of classroom management skills was often blamed for student misbehavior and poor classroom habits, as described by Emily: “The Chinese staff completely don’t know how to deal with the issue.” Two participants also witnessed LTs’ unacceptable disciplining methods. Thomas confessed: “I have seen Chinese staff members do things that I feel are incredibly inappropriate and would call for a disciplinary in my country.” Some respondents believed Chinese parents’ overly relaxed or too strict discipline might also be a reason for student misbehavior. Sara observed: “You can see the parents beating a child in the middle of the street, they are yelling on child and pushing a child in the middle of the street when the other passing by.” In contrast, Michael noted that “they [the students] don’t have limits at home. You’re the first person to tell them no.”

Changing Classroom Management Practices. With no school-wide discipline systems in their schools and no support from the LTs, some of my participants felt powerless in dealing with misbehaving students. For example, William observed that his students did not distinguish class time and break time and “were unable to behave themselves at different areas.” Jane remembered a student who “shouted every time when I went to class for the whole lesson, just to have none of the kids working, and would just shout at me, ‘f*** you.’” When she reported her problem to the local homeroom teacher, the LT’s reply was, “It’s OK, just ignore it, the kid doesn’t know what he’s saying.” Lily believed that many classroom management problems could be solved if teaching assistants were present in ETs’ classrooms, especially in younger grades, but it was impossible “because of the shortage of the staff and the budget.” Consequently, many

of my participants realized that discipline was necessary for the quality of their work and decided to change their classroom management practices.

Being Strict. Being strict and setting clear boundaries with the students were my respondents' common approaches to discipline. For example, Michael described himself as "stern and kind" and believed his students would take advantage of a lax teacher because "those kids, you give them an inch, they run a mile." Anna also believed that "it's important to maintain a level of distance in order to preserve your authority in the classroom." Gabriel learned from his past mistakes that demanding respect from students was necessary. He valued "being friendly, but not being their friends." However, Stefan admitted that only being strict is not enough. He said, "Well, for behavior, let's say, maybe [I'm] a little bit strict. But, you know, when you cannot change anything and you're only strict, you gonna get crazier, you will give up."

Focusing on Building Rapport. A few participants realized that building rapport and forming closer bonds with their students led to better behavior, as observed by Oliver: "Often new teachers try to put on a persona and be very strict with students and act how they think they should be as teachers. But then you change and realize that it is really about relationships with students." Sara confirmed that showing her human face improved her classroom atmosphere because the students "started to realize that I'm not teacher, I'm a human being." Emily also mentioned that knowing the students well improved the quality of her relationships: "I get the privilege of sticking with my class for three years. So, now is my last year with most of them. ... So, I've gotten the chance to create a good relationship with my students and their parents."

Engaging Students. Another approach to discipline employed by a few of my participants was positively involving students in the classroom. William observed that Chinese students "don't get a lot of choices" and always enjoy a sense of ownership and responsibility

when they are included in decision making. Nicole proposed giving the students some responsibility for the classroom and positively engaging them. She said, “I think that students, when they give you feedback of what they want and if you let them take command of how they want the class to be, I think that will make things run more smoothly.” Anna mentioned that she introduced a job system in her kindergarten classroom: “For example, one of the kids is responsible for being in the water area. ... Then another kid, for example, his job is to be next to the table serving the food, so he can control the line.” Her students enjoyed the little jobs and felt ownership of their classroom.

Rearranging Classroom Space. Those participants who had their own classrooms reported the benefits of rearranging their spaces to prevent student misbehavior and create a better learning environment. For example, Lily noticed that her lessons had often been disturbed by students playing with teaching aids without permission. She decided to “take all the boxes next to me so they [the students] cannot touch anything, and they cannot make any noise without permission.” She also changed the seating arrangement in her classroom to a half-circle because “they see me, but they also see each other.” Sara, who did not enjoy teaching in a regular classroom, decided to move to another learning area: “There is no tables and chairs. There is five of six sofas that I can put in a circle. There is a board. So basically, students sit all together in a circle.” She found this new arrangement “important if you want to make energy for sharing.”

Enjoying Little Victories. Some of my coinvestigators reported their progress in taking charge of their classrooms and shared little victories and success stories of turning discipline around. For example, William employed a successful discipline intervention that restored order in his classroom: “I applied several strategies and a few plans, and they all panned out. So, it was quite all right. It took me only, like, two months. I would say that’s quite fast.” Lily noticed that

speaking some Mandarin improved her impact on the students. Gabriel confessed, “If I see myself teaching the first year, I’ve learned a lot of things and I’ve changed a lot of things. ... Because at the beginning, I won’t lie to you, my classroom management wasn’t good at all.”

Relationships with the Parents

The students’ parents paid their children’s tuition and were important stakeholders in my participants’ schools. In Oliver’s words, the parents had “more sway and influence than in a public school.” However, most of my respondents, except for one kindergarten teacher, reported having little or no regular, direct contact with the parents. This was due to ETs’ limited ability to communicate in Mandarin and the parents’ insufficient English proficiency, but also because LTs took leading roles in most classrooms. Moreover, although ETs might serve as school mascots and appear prominently in promotional materials, my participants often remained inaccessible for direct, unsupervised contact with the parents because, as Martha explained, “the school tries to keep us in the distance from the parents.” However, despite the limited contact, some respondents felt the students’ parents did not care about their children and harmed them by sending them, even at a very young age, to boarding schools.

Negative Experiences with the Parents. When thinking about communicating problems to her students’ parents, Anna said, “Most Chinese parents, they don’t want to face the truth, especially when you try to say that there are some problems with the child.” William lamented that the parents did not see teachers as allies and failed to realize that “the school is on the same side with the parents.” Moreover, unreasonable parental expectations and complaints were a common negative experience my participants had with their students’ parents. For example, Oliver observed that “sometimes there’s a gap between the reality and the ideas that parents have.” Stefan met some parents who “will tell you how you should do your job, what you should

do, what kind of semester plan, what kind of curriculum.” Many respondents were angered at their supervisors for accepting all parental complaints and sympathized with their local coworkers who had to respond to parents even late at night.

Positive Experiences with the Parents. A few positive experiences with the students’ parents also appeared in my participants’ accounts. Martha cherished occasional signs of parental appreciation, for example, “when they finally notice I’m a teacher and they say, oh, thank you, teacher, my son told me about you, how much he loves (subject) now.” Some, like Anna, rarely received parental complaints because “the parents are satisfied with everything.” Devon also admitted he had “a great relationship with the parents” because of his business and marketing background. Nicole shared a touching story of being invited to her former students’ graduation party a year after leaving the school. The students’ parents wanted her presence so much that they paid all the travel and accommodation expenses so that Nicole, her husband, and her two sons could make a journey across China for one day just to be at the graduation party of students who loved her dearly.

Interacting with the Parents. Emily was the only participant who mentioned being regularly contacted by the students’ parents directly. She stated: “If they want to talk to me, they’ll talk to me in English if they can.” Two other participants mentioned sporadically seeing some of the parents. Others had no contact with the parents or only communicated with them online. Sara explained her situation: “With the parents, in current school, I communicate through the Banagebac, sending reports about the students’ behavior.” Some participants interacted with the parents in school-led WeChat groups, but the contact was rather superficial, as explained by Gabriel: “They demand us to give information to parents, but sometimes it’s not, like, good quality information.” When asked to join parental groups for her classes on WeChat, Jane refused

because she only cared about the students. She explained, “I’m not at school to please the parent or to answer the parent’s questions.”

My participants saw themselves in service of their paying customers: the students and their parents. Although many enjoyed teaching children and witnessing their growth, complaints about the difficulty of working with the local students were common. My respondents did not necessarily blame the students for their misbehavior, but tried to understand their learners and modify their teaching methods and classroom management practices to match their students’ needs and learning styles. While few participants had direct contact with their students’ parents, many perceived the parents as a source of complaints and unreasonable expectations.

Trying to Function in a Multicultural Work Environment

We are all people from different cultures, different countries, with different mentalities, different attitudes to life. It is all about how you survive.

-Anna

My participants’ schools were multicultural work environments that blended the common characteristics of a Chinese workplace with the experiences and expectations of ETs from different parts of the world. Interactions with the management and other teachers shaped my respondents’ work life and led to adjustments in handling professional relationships. Communication was often inhibited by the language barrier and cultural misunderstandings.

Relationships with the Management

For almost all of my participants, school leadership was an emotional topic and a point of dissatisfaction. For example, Michael did not hide his feelings when he said: “Oh, I f***ing hate Chinese management!” Devon observed: “I don’t think people understand the difference between a leader and a boss here.” Anna also confessed that “all bad, negative things I have in all of the

companies I have worked in in China is about management.” Chinese-style leadership often led to frustration and, in several cases, leaving a job.

Expatriate Teachers’ Perceptions of the Management. What my respondents called “Chinese-style leadership” often meant running a school without regard for cultural and contractual differences between local and international staff members. Devon insisted that “you can’t use a Chinese manner to manage foreigners” since “the way we do things is completely different.” It was clear that leadership in my respondents’ schools changed frequently, sometimes even yearly. William confessed, “The school, for the last five years, had more time not having a principal than having one.” Every school year could potentially bring extreme changes to employees’ working conditions because, as Emily stated, everything “depended on who the boss is.”

Some participants mentioned having helpful expatriate coordinators. Michael talked about his head of year who had been at the school for many years: “He knows how the school works and has my back.” Others, like Jane, described their expatriate supervisors as unsupportive: “What really, really shocked me was that our foreign coordinator walked in, he sat down, he put his headphones on his ears, and that was it for the rest of the year.” Notably, most felt that their expatriate managers had little or no power. Emily explained: “We have English admin, but they don’t really have a say in everything. It’s always, like, the Chinese that have the say, the final say in everything.”

Indirect Contact. Complaints about workplace hierarchies and the inability to access administrators directly were common in my participants’ accounts. Many mentioned the expectation that regular employees did not, in Oliver’s words, “talk back at the chain.” Lily explained why she could not talk to her principal directly: “I have to go to my leader, and then

my leader goes to his/her leader, and then they go higher and higher.” The expectation to know one’s place in the hierarchy was particularly difficult for those participants who wanted to offer constructive criticism and make changes in their workplaces.

When I asked my participants in their individual interviews what they thought their schools would like to change about them, several answered similarly to Oliver, who said, “To stop asking so many questions.” Many felt that their Chinese managers told, informed, and demanded, but never discussed or asked for opinions. Laura shared what happened in a summary meeting when she voiced some critical feedback: “The atmosphere in the room, everything was changed immediately.” Like Laura, many of my participants quickly learned that their local managers only expected positive feedback and were terrified of complaints and direct criticism.

Negative Experiences with the Management. My participants’ accounts contained numerous negative experiences with their schools’ leadership. Many assessed their managers as incompetent and unprepared for the job. For example, Sara found her previous line manager unqualified for his position: “They hired two (subject) teachers with master degree, but they gave line managing to the one who... I don’t want to talk about him... But he doesn’t... I’m sure that he faked his university diploma.” Some also believed the leadership to be disorganized and lacking in planning skills. Stefan mentioned his management was “sometimes organizing things in the last moment, like, someone forgot to do something, and we have to finish that not today even, but now, in this hour!”

Some participants portrayed the local management as disrespectful and spiteful. They shared instances of when they felt micromanaged, unfairly reprimanded, or did not receive due recognition for their work. For example, Jane said, “If you do something to, I guess, cause trouble for them [the management], even if they are wrong, they will do something to get you

back.” Feeling unsupported by the school management was a complaint voiced by many of my coinvestigators. Michael mentioned that “they [the management] are looking for a reason to throw anyone under the bus.” Gabriel felt that even long-time employees could expect no loyalty from his school’s management team.

Another aspect of local leadership some of my coinvestigators complained about was unequal treatment. According to some participants, Chinese management teams showed a preference for and offered better treatment to ETs who were White, male, from developed countries, and native speakers of English. For example, William, who is ethnically Chinese and comes from an English-speaking country in Asia, admitted that he had been “rejected by several schools” because the management had looked “for a Western-face feature.” As a mixed-race woman from a country in Africa, Jane also experienced this difference in treatment: “Some people get treated very, very well, and other people don’t get treated as well.”

Positive Experiences with the Management. Despite the difficult contact and many negative experiences with the Chinese management, some positive experiences also appeared in my participants’ accounts. A few respondents felt trusted, valued, and supported. For example, Thomas admitted that he was “issued quite a lot of freedom.” Anna felt appreciated by her school’s leadership because she frequently received gifts: “This is really nice because they do appreciate the work we, everything we contribute to this company, they do appreciate that.” Moreover, Lily mentioned that her leadership had treated her fairly when she was pregnant: “They paid all the benefits, and all the teachers that were pregnant, they got all the things they were supposed to get without any problems.”

Relationships with Other Teachers

Relationships with other teachers were not as common a topic in my participants' accounts as the management. Several respondents mentioned the challenges of working alongside the LTs and their strategies for dealing with their Chinese coworkers. However, my coinvestigators spoke surprisingly little about their relationships with other ETs.

Relationships with the Local Teachers. Many of my participants' schools witnessed a divide between LTs and ETs, or in Michael's words, "a pitting match of them versus us." Martha complained that "most of [local] homeroom teachers, they refuse to have any interaction with a foreign teacher." However, my respondents also admitted that the LTs were often overworked, exploited by the management, and under so much pressure that many left the job even in the middle of the school year. Stefan explained, "It's much more pressure on them [LTs] here. They [the management] are using us [ETs] more for commercial and that things, but national teachers doing, like, most of the job." Adam observed that "the Chinese colleagues, the homeroom teachers, they communicate with parents, and I think that they are working really, really hard."

My participants generally had negative impressions of their local coworkers. Many LTs lacked international experience and even basic English proficiency. Some respondents noted that their local coworkers were not up to the standard of a reputable school and often showed a poor attitude to work. Laura confessed, "I faced enough from Chinese colleagues who were lazy and didn't want to work." Some, like Jane, found their LTs unsupportive: "So, they either don't greet me, they're not very helpful, and I feel like sometimes they create situations in the class so that things can go wrong, and then they don't help." A few participants also felt the LTs treated them as competition. Lily mentioned in her written protocol that "most of the Chinese teachers

consider foreign teachers as a competitors and it is quite challenging to work in a team and cooperate with them.”

Strategies for Dealing with the Local Teachers. My respondents displayed different kinds of behaviors when dealing with the LTs in their schools. Some showed persistence and attempted to change the LTs. Others tried to compromise with the LTs for the sake of good working relationships. Not trusting the LTs and avoiding them was also a common approach.

Staying Persistent. Some participants showed initiative and persistence in their interactions with the LTs. For example, Laura learned to say no to her local coworkers. She reported refusing to work during her time off and noticed that the LTs “were not offended, but they expected that I would help them.” Jane, who usually avoided conflict, realized that her LTs often took advantage of her, so she found that “you have to toughen up, and you have to stand up for yourself.” Martha learned to go around her LTs when they refused to share her homework with the students. She explained: “When I see that communication with a homeroom teacher is really hard, I communicate with students directly. On Friday afternoon, I come to the classroom to remind, to give them worksheets that day, just before they go home.”

Attempting to Change the Local Teachers. Attempts to change the LTs and their ways also appeared in some participants’ accounts. For example, Laura tried helping her overworked teaching partner to “not take things so seriously and close to her heart, not to be so emotional, relax more, try to have more rest for herself.” Anna mentioned trying to influence her local teaching partners’ behavior in the classroom, but later understood that she had “no right to change any other people’s personality.” Martha noticed that “Chinese teachers don’t say ‘good morning’ to foreign teachers” because “they have no manners, first of all, and some of them say

that they're shy." She tried teaching the LTs the habit of greeting expatriate coworkers and responding to their greetings, but soon realized the effort was futile.

Compromising with the Local Teachers. Several participants admitted that they cared about their rapport with the LTs and were ready to give up on some of their beliefs for the sake of good working relationships. This approach mostly pertained to those who worked closely with their local teaching partners. Nicole explained: "I think that having a good [local] partner who you are compatible with can either make or break your time and experience at a school." Devon admitted that he often gave in to his local teaching partner's wishes: "I'm trying to, you know, balance a little bit. Like, OK, let's do yours and see how it goes. Because your plan is not really what I want." Similarly, Adam remained open to his LTs' suggestions: "I'm trying to change my approach too, and be more patient, also try to learn, to work the way it should be in China, you know? I'm still learning to do that."

Not Trusting the Local Teachers. A few participants understood that they could not trust the LTs in their schools, gave up on trying to interact with them, and ultimately started avoiding the LTs. For example, Michael admitted that he "learned not to trust the Chinese staff 'cause they'll burn you for anything." He tried "being nice to them, but not too nice." For Emily, the reason to stay cautious about her LTs was an experience with a bilingual teaching partner who did not translate her words truthfully to the parents. Emily regretted not speaking more Mandarin because "from what I know now, I know that some [LTs] do not translate things properly." Jane recently decided to limit her interaction with the LTs to the minimum: "I left them alone because I thought that if I was nice and I smiled and I didn't bother them for anything, they would leave me alone too." Similarly, Martha stopped asking LTs for help and started counting on herself

because “when you try, try, try, and then you see it doesn’t make any sense, you need to find your own way to communicate.”

Relationships with Other Expatriate Teachers. My participants spoke little about their relationships with other ETs. It became clear that a sense of unity among the expatriate staff was lacking in many of my respondents’ schools. Gabriel lamented this state of affairs: “The way I see it is, teachers, especially, expat teachers, should be united no matter what.” He added “I try to see the most objective way, but sometimes you find colleagues that take it, take things so personal, and it’s quite difficult because they put, or they give priority to things that don’t help our unity.”

One reason for the lack of unity among ETs might be that many of my respondents had more contact with the LTs than other ETs, as explained by Laura: “We work with Chinese teachers in our team, we don’t work with expat teachers. So, I’m the only expat teacher in my team.” Thomas noted that relationships were closer with the LTs if other ETs taught different subjects: “I think it’s because we’ve all got the subject that we teach in common.” Stefan had a similar opinion and added, “It’s easier to communicate and you can understand each other much faster than some other department.” Oliver also observed that “the nature of international schools is that people come and go,” so lasting relationships might be rare.

Keeping a Distance. A common reason why some of my respondents avoided forming close relationships with their expatriate coworkers was the fear of being exploited. Anna admitted that it was hard to say no to friends, and “when you become too friendly with the people you work with, they start being so friendly with you that they sometimes try to shift their job on your shoulders.” Jane experienced what she called “piggybacking.” She explained, “There are people in the office that, I’m just gonna say, they’re not good, they have no clue what they

are doing. ... I feel they want to piggyback on someone else's back." She then added bitterly, "But then they will get the recognition, and you are the one putting in all of the hard work. And, I don't know, I just really don't like it."

Expecting Support. A few participants reported having supportive expatriate coworkers and good working relationships with them. Michael admitted: "I have several seasoned teachers that I work with and these seasoned teachers, I can go and ask them for help and ideas and bounce ideas off of them. By doing that, it works so much better." Similarly, Gabriel received support from an expatriate colleague when he first started teaching in his school: "I had the chance to observe some of his classes, and that was really helpful because I got the idea." However, some participants spoke of insufficient support from the other ETs at their schools. William mentioned the expatriate coworkers in his previous school did not contribute enough: "The other teachers were, like... They were cooperative, but they didn't provide much. They're just, oh yes, nodding and taking notes." Sara admitted that "like everywhere, there is colleagues that are willing to help and there are colleagues, they are pretending they're willing, but do nothing."

Fearing Conflict. Some participants kept their contact with other ETs to a minimum out of fear of conflict. Laura spoke of an expatriate coordinator who was in conflict with many of her coworkers. In Laura's opinion, "she [the coordinator] had that high position only because she was a native speaker" but "didn't have educational background as she should for this position." Laura felt the coordinator "was very jealous if she met non-native speakers who had this education that was needed for that position, so she tried to make life for others more complicated." Anna also mentioned an expatriate colleague who was in conflict with her and many of her coworkers: "She didn't like me at all, because she, maybe she felt that I'm a

competitor to her, I don't know. But she was making complaints behind my back because she and the principal were big friends.”

Being Part of a Diverse Workplace

My participants' schools included less diversity than could be expected. In most cases, the students and staff were overwhelmingly local, and the expatriate minority consisted of individuals who usually came from a few Western English-speaking countries and Europe. The expectation for English as the universal language of communication was not satisfied when the LTs and the management were unable or unwilling to communicate in English.

Struggling with the Work Culture. Most of my participants struggled to accept the Chinese work culture and the local work ethic. Devon acknowledged that “the way we think, or the logic, is not the same way Chinese people think.” The Chinese concept of *face*, which my coinvestigators saw as particularly troubling, includes “gaining face” by enhancing one’s image and social status, and “saving face,” or attempts to maintain a high social standing by avoiding behaviors that could potentially damage one’s reputation (Long & Aziz, 2022, p. 47). Some, like Nicole, saw attempts at saving face as dishonesty and cowardice: “I believe in being a straight shooter, you know? Just say it like it is, tell it like it is, whether if it’s good or bad, you know, and then we can work from there.” In Lily’s opinion, saving face sometimes turned into backstabbing. She explained: “They will not tell you, but they will go to your boss and tell your boss that you did something wrong. And they will tell other people that you did something wrong, but not into your face.”

A common problem for my coinvestigators was the implied expectation to work unpaid overtime. Anna observed, “We are culturally diverse because in Chinese culture, it’s absolutely normal that the Chinese teachers overwork all the time. ... But for us, it’s not normal. If we all

work in our countries, then we have to be paid.” Oliver blamed the need to work overtime on flaws in the work management system: “Actually, we had an email at 5 o’clock this morning from our academic director. ... And I think that’s, yeah, seen as doing hard work, isn’t it?” He added: “But I think what’s not commented on is the fact that the systems in place are not... People shouldn’t be working those kind of hours to get the job done. It means something else is, something’s gone wrong.”

Workplace Atmosphere. The atmosphere in many of my participants’ schools was determined by constant change. High teacher turnover was part of the expatriate experience for many because, as noted by Oliver, “some people move regularly, change cities as well.” Leadership was also in constant flux, and every change meant new requirements for the faculty. Emily explained, “Like, this year, we have a new boss, so we’re having to adjust to his expectations.” Gabriel also mentioned the constantly changing curriculum arrangements. He said, “I can notice how sometimes the school do these kind of [curriculum] changes where you have to adapt very quickly and adjust your teaching style in some way and find a way to prepare all the material.”

Notably, mentions of a good workplace atmosphere, satisfaction with coworkers, and team spirit were common, especially among those participants who had worked in their schools for a few years. Lily emphasized, “I have a very good team. We work together already for three years. Some teachers left, some teachers came, but the main core is the same.” However, the term “toxic environment” also appeared frequently in my respondents’ accounts. Stefan mentioned teachers forming cliques: “We had, like, couple teachers hang out together, but they don’t speak with other group, with other group, with other group. Like, a lot of fights, and a lot of that kind of problems.” Some participants stated that their schools had an atmosphere of

unhealthy competition, or, in Michael's words, the environment was "turning into a game of thrones." Anna described the consequences of a toxic workplace atmosphere: "The people stop smiling, they're all depressed, they don't want to go to work, then they all complain."

Barriers to Communication. My participants mentioned three barriers to communication in their schools: the language barrier, face culture, and ineffective information flow. The low Mandarin proficiency among most of my respondents and their local coworkers' low English proficiency often contributed to misunderstandings. For example, Thomas mentioned in his protocol the need to consider local coworkers' English level. He wrote, "Sticking to semi-formal [register] seems counter intuitive, but if you are too formal, it will feel to your coworkers that you might be using deliberately complex language to disrespect them or belittle their knowledge." Stefan insisted that "at least head of department should have some communication [in English]. When we organizing something, hoooh, all those troubles because of bad communication, language barrier, having to work with the teacher who cannot speak any English."

For many of my participants, the Chinese insistence on saving face was an annoyance, a sign of dishonesty or disrespect, and a substantial obstacle to effective communication. Like many, Nicole had trouble accepting the evasive way of approaching problems and found it immature and a form of backstabbing. She lamented that her local colleagues "would rather, instead of speaking to you one on one as an adult –you would think that it's like a normal thing to do– they would rather go and talk about it to someone else." In Laura's opinion, face culture was inefficient: "They will try to find some other ways how to inform you and usually, in my opinion, it's like, time wasting." Some participants also struggled with the use of silence as a polite but definitive way to refuse.

The third barrier to communication mentioned by my respondents was the ineffective information flow in their schools. It was common that ETs “are given information as the last ones or even not given at all,” as Martha admitted. Adam explained: “We have one person who is responsible to share everything with expat teachers. But very often and recently even more often, this person is occupied with too many different things to do, too much work to do.” Furthermore, the person tasked with relaying information to ETs might be a low-ranking employee with limited access to information. Oliver described the result: “Information is not shared clearly to the person who might need that information, or if decisions are made, sometimes it’s forgotten to tell the person who the decision is actually about.”

Meetings. Chinese managers’ preference for meetings as a form of communicating with employees and displaying authority were my participants’ point of dissatisfaction and led to many complaints. Oliver joked, “If an idea is considered important, that means you need to have a four-hour meeting about it.” Many complained about the frequency and length of meetings. Lily admitted that staff meetings in her school were “long and not much useful.” Devon stated that “some meetings, you don’t need to be out there, but they want you to be there.” He added that “some meetings, that could be an email.”

Strategies for Survival in a Diverse Workplace. My participants mentioned different strategies to adjust to working in their multicultural workplaces with strong Chinese characteristics. Accepting and embracing diversity was the first step and often a challenge. Sara opined, “We should try to understand their [the locals’] perspective, not bring our perspective and think that our perspective is only right.” Stefan agreed when he said, “I will work with someone from USA, from Great Britain, from Africa, from Europe, from everywhere. And I have

to adjust myself to do their things but I also expect other guys will understand that, and they will adjust.”

Learning Mandarin. Some participants saw learning Mandarin as a way to ease their burden in a Chinese workplace. Lily understood the benefits of basic Mandarin proficiency for communicating with the students and advised her younger self in her protocol: “Learn more Chinese, as students like to talk in the native language during the lesson.” Emily agreed that better Mandarin proficiency would help her communicate with the students’ parents, which was better “than using a bilingual teacher.” However, mastering Mandarin was not very important for all of my participants. For example, Michael admitted that “learning Chinese is definitely not the highest thing on my priority list.” Laura suggested organizing Mandarin classes for the expatriate staff at her school but found no support from her managers: “Each time when I asked about Chinese language, that it would be great if the school could organize some Chinese language course, they said that no, it’s better if you will find Chinese boyfriend.”

Working Harder Than Others. A few participants tried to keep up with the rat race in their school and avoid complaints about the quality of their work. This attitude primarily applied to those who were less experienced or did not meet the ET profile preferred by CIS. For example, Jane admitted in her protocol that she “adopted an ambitious strategy of working diligently to become an exemplary educator, aspiring to demonstrate my merit.” Nicole confessed: “Whatever it was that they needed from me, I did try my best to go above and beyond to do that. Volunteering to do things, you know, doing extra work.” She added, “I’ve put even more effort than anyone else, but other teachers could brag about how they are mediocre teachers and brag about how they can do the bare minimum and not be micromanaged because they’re the right color.”

Caring About Community. Several participants found community building an important strategy to survive in their schools. For example, Devon cared about socializing with his coworkers and saw himself as “the entertainer of the group.” He explained, “I’m good with team spirit because you know, if you don’t have anything to rely on and to, like, have fun with, the job is actually really tiring.” Sara also mentioned regularly spending time with her team outside of work: “Once or two in a month, we went somewhere together.” Dealing with problems internally was another way to build rapport with the coworkers, as suggested by Lily who said, “We solve all the problems inside our team.”

Trying to Improve Efficiency. Many of my participants rejected the inefficient ways of Chinese communication and preferred confrontation and a direct way of solving problems. For example, Oliver described his attempts to reduce unnecessary paperwork when handling student grades. Initially, the scores had to be processed in five different ways. Oliver explained the result of his intervention: “We got it down to two forms, which I would take as a win.” Laura cared about improving time efficiency in meetings. She confessed, “Maybe I am that one in my team who really tries to organize my colleagues and make our weekly meetings as short as possible. So, I really very strictly follow the time.” She added: “And when I start to hear that the information that my colleagues share with us is really, like, has no sense, I immediately try to stop it and ask about next point.”

Employment in schools with diverse work environments that heavily relied on Chinese work ethics posed serious adjustment challenges to my participants. Their perceptions of the local management were mostly negative and determined by expectations of better efficiency and transparency. My coinvestigators also struggled with the LTs and dealt with them by staying persistent, trying to change them, compromise with them, or avoid them. Relationships with

other ETs constituted only a minor part of my respondents' overall work experience, but many complained about the lack of unity among the expatriate staff.

Outlier Data and Findings: Being an Emergency Hire

Nicole is in her late forties, Black, and from an English-speaking country in North America. She shared her experience of being an emergency hire at a high-ranking internationalized school. Her story is presented as an outlier because it was a unique case in my participant pool. It is worth telling because it illustrates a point several of my respondents mentioned about unequal hiring practices and unfair treatment in CIS.

A year ago, Nicole worked in a prestigious internationalized school in a second-tier eastern city. She had been at the school for six consecutive years and was very satisfied with all aspects of the job except her compensation, which reflected the standards of a second-tier Chinese city. However, the salary mattered because Nicole was involved in a school-building project in a disadvantaged part of the world, and her job in China cofinanced the enterprise. Attracted by an extremely generous job offer from a high-ranking internationalized school in another part of China, Nicole decided to change jobs.

At first, she was impressed with the school facilities and the fact that the company “spared no expense with providing all of the amenities that would make the students and the teachers comfortable there.” However, she quickly realized the price of her salary was “double the stress, double the headache, double the disrespect, double the micromanagement, and double the racism.” Although she worked hard and her students met all the achievement targets and “were always among the highest scores,” Nicole understood she was not welcome. She felt the administration treated her as a necessary evil. She admitted that the managers put her under a lot of pressure and “were trying to look for anything, any reason so they could have a kind of a

paper trail to show that they're slowly trying to push me out." Nicole's coworkers sympathized, but "they could just say that they're sorry about it and just go on with their lives."

Later in the year, Nicole was put on probation and ultimately dismissed at the end of the school year, in the middle of her two-year contract, without the school providing any reasonable explanation. However, with her last salary, she also received a performance bonus for her students' high scores at a school-wide final assessment. The management also promised that Nicole would "receive all of the benefits" because "they [the school] are the ones who broke the contract." When reliving the conversations leading to her termination, Nicole remembered that the human resources manager "said thank you, and he also said, you saved our ass. That's exactly what he said, you saved our ass. He says, but I just don't feel like you're quite what we're looking for."

Nicole finally understood why the school had employed her: "Because I was an emergency hire, because the person they initially hired wasn't able to make it to China because of COVID." She only got fired because "they wanted someone less ethnic." Nicole left the company with a performance bonus, severance pay, and many bad memories for her and her son, who was a student at the school. However, the story has a happy ending. The school where Nicole had previously worked for six years gratefully hired her back.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. Based on data provided by my participants in individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups, I identified four major work adjustment themes: discovering what lies behind the façade, trying to be a real teacher, navigating relationships with the paying customers, and trying to function in a

multicultural work environment. The themes supported the central research question and the four sub-questions derived from the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

Central Research Question

How do expatriate teachers experience work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools? My participants' diverse backgrounds afforded them differing perspectives on their work adjustment. However, working in CIS brought many surprises and disappointments for those who had teaching experience in their home countries as much as for those new to teaching. The respondents realized CIS were unique work environments focused on profit and selling an international image. For most, accepting the role of a school mascot rather than a real teacher required an unwelcome mental shift. My coinvestigators dealt with the imposed role by staying true to their beliefs and standards, showing initiative, or trying to change their mindsets and expectations. However, some learned to let go and give up on their ideals, as described by William: "I don't really care much already about, like, trying to make things right or stand up against the things that I'm not comfortable with or that seemed wrong to me. I mean, I know things are like that."

The ETs in my sample struggled with the challenges of teaching a mixed curriculum and their coexistence alongside the LTs. They responded by rejecting the local ways, tuning in to student needs, or adapting to the local ways. Many compensated for their diminished role with self-initiated professional development. The expectation to serve the paying customers, the students and their parents, led my participants to adjust their approaches to their learners by using incentives, trying to remember students' names, and getting more sensitive about them. Common responses to classroom management challenges included being strict, focusing on building rapport, engaging students, rearranging classroom space, and enjoying little victories.

Being part of a multicultural work environment required my coinvestigators to adjust their attitudes toward school leadership, local coworkers, and other ETs. Most struggled with the hierarchical structures of a Chinese workplace and the expectation for indirect contact with the management. My respondents dealt with the LTs in their schools either by staying persistent, attempting to change the LTs, compromising with the LTs, or not trusting them. For many respondents, other ETs were not an essential component of the job as they felt closer to the LTs, intentionally kept a distance from other ETs, or feared conflict with them. However, some expected support from their international coworkers and often received it. To survive in a multicultural and sometimes competitive workplace, my participants adjusted by learning Mandarin, working harder than others, caring about the workplace community, and trying to improve work efficiency in their schools.

Sub-Question One

What are expatriate teachers' experiences of adjusting their work environments (activeness) in Chinese internationalized schools? In their work adjustment, my participants frequently displayed activeness, that is, they attempted to change their work environments rather than themselves to reduce job dissatisfaction (Dawis, 2005). The implicit expectation of being a school mascot or, in Martha's words, "merely decoration," was not readily accepted, and some respondents fought to be acknowledged as real teachers. They did so by guarding their reputations, trying to appear professional, adhering to teacher ethics and high work standards, setting a positive example to others, always doing quality work, and following an inner sense of duty. For example, Anna emphasized her convictions by saying, "I have a reputation of being a professional teacher so I cannot, you know, behave in a different way. I have to be always up to the standard."

Moreover, some participants rejected the local teacher- and textbook-centered instructional methods and insisted on engaging, hands-on teaching that was familiar to them, as explained by Jane: “I feel uncomfortable walking to the class, delivering a lesson that I know is not what I do.” Some respondents sought their students’ affection by using incentives and working hard to remember student names despite the large number of children taught every week. Moreover, they were proactive in their classroom management practices by rearranging their classroom spaces and finding ways to engage the students. For example, Lily changed her classroom layout and the seating arrangement and wanted her students to “see me, but also see each other.”

When dealing with the LTs, some respondents stayed persistent in their beliefs and even attempted to change the LTs. For example, Jane, who usually avoided conflict, noticed that her LTs often took advantage of her, so she realized that “you have to toughen up, and you have to stand up for yourself.” Martha observed that “Chinese teachers don’t say ‘good morning’ to foreign teachers” because “they have no manners, first of all, and some of them say that they’re shy.” Consequently, she attempted to teach her LTs the habit of greeting ETs and responding to their greetings.

Moreover, my participants displayed activeness as a strategy for survival in a multicultural workplace. Some tried working harder than others to stay ahead in a competitive environment, as explained by Nicole: “Whatever it was that they needed from me, I did try my best to go above and beyond to do that. Volunteering to do things, you know, doing extra work.” Others tried bridging the language barrier by learning Mandarin, worked to build a sense of workplace community, and strived to improve work efficiency in their teams. Laura explained,

“Maybe I am that one in my team who really tries to organize my colleagues and make our weekly meetings as short as possible.”

Sub-Question Two

What are expatriate teachers’ experiences of adjusting to their work environments (reactiveness) in Chinese internationalized schools? My participants mentioned many examples of reactiveness, that is, their attempts to change themselves, their attitudes and expectations rather than the environment, to meet their job demands (Dawis, 2005). When confronted with the expectations of their roles as ETs, some responded by changing their mindsets. For example, Laura, after many disappointments, stopped being overly ambitious and found it helpful “not to be so emotional, relax more, [and] try to have more rest.” Others lowered their expectations, accepted things as they were, or did not dare to change anything. For example, Devon realized that some aspects of his job could not be altered: “So yeah, you know, sometimes you gotta understand that you need to let go, right? ‘Cause you don’t control some stuff.”

Furthermore, my participants changed themselves when dealing with their students and planning their teaching. Many shifted mentally to considering their students’ needs and including some local ways in their classroom practices. For example, Michael noticed that not all jokes were appropriate with his students, and he “stopped doing that [joking] as much ‘cause I’ve learned these kids are pretty soft.” Oliver realized his preferred teaching methods did not necessarily respond to his students’ learning styles: “I used to use quite a lot of flipped-classroom-kind of ideas, but I definitely changed that.” Similarly, Lily accepted that her default classroom management approach, Positive Discipline, did not work with her local students. She explained, “So, for me, giving rewards and punishments to kids is a terrible thing. But, unfortunately, here in China, because of the cultural background, this kind of management

works...” Several participants also realized the need to improve their qualifications and teaching skills, which resulted in seeking professional development opportunities.

When dealing with other teachers in their schools, some of my respondents changed their attitudes and expectations. For example, Devon described how he tried to compromise when planning lessons with his LT: “I’m trying to, you know, balance a little bit. Like, OK, let’s do yours and see how it goes. Because your plan is not really what I want.” A few participants realized that their LTs could not be trusted. For example, Emily regretted not speaking more Mandarin because “from what I know now, I know that some [LTs] do not translate things properly.” Some gave up on their LTs and tried to find ways around them. For example, Martha said, “When you try, try, try, and then you see it doesn’t make any sense, you need to find your own way to communicate.” Some participants also admitted lowering their expectations of the relationships with their fellow ETs, mostly out of fear of being exploited or involved in open conflict. Jane explained, “There are people in the office that, I’m just gonna say, they’re not good, they have no clue what they are doing. ... I feel they want to piggyback on someone else’s back.”

Sub-Question Three

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience flexibility in work adjustment? Flexibility describes the degree of dissatisfaction with the work environment tolerated by an individual before attempting adjustment (Dawis, 2005). My participants varied in their response times to job-related discomfort, and some did not mention or did not recall how long they waited before attempting adjustment. It appeared that flexibility was a feature of adjustment that heavily depended on personality and context. However, one job aspect involved an immediate reaction: poor classroom discipline, which several participants

could not tolerate from the beginning. For example, William explained how long it took him to realize the need to change his classroom management: “One day! ... As soon as I walked into class, and I realized it.” Similarly, Anna described her reaction to poor discipline in her classroom: “And I was just observing for the first week, but the first week made it clear that it’s high time to change it.”

Other work adjustments took longer, and my participants’ response times and discomfort tolerance varied. For example, Adam admitted it took at least a year in a new school “to feel that you know what you are doing.” Lily waited five months before deciding to change her lesson routines and include Mandarin translation in her classes. Sara needed over one semester to understand that building rapport with her students was the key to effective teaching. She admitted, “When that happened, definitely everything changed.” Realizing the need to notify the parents about students’ homework assignments took Michael over two years. He only then noticed that “the kids were just lying galore that I wasn’t checking their homework.” Thomas waited for a few years before being ready to confront his expatriate coworkers about a shared responsibility for student success. He explained, “I suppose I felt like I hadn’t reached a level of seniority in the staff to actually articulate my point, to be heard well enough, so I actually took a few years.”

Sub-Question Four

How do expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools experience perseverance in work adjustment? Perseverance reflects how long an individual persists in work adjustment attempts before leaving the job (Dawis, 2005). Although only one of my participants decided to change jobs around the time of my data collection, most had the experience of changing employment in the past, and some even did it several times. My coinvestigators did not

need to think long about what would move them to quit a job in CIS or what had moved them to do it in the past. Poor school leadership was the most common reason that included working under incompetent, unfair, unsupportive, and spiteful managers. Anna, whose opinion was shared by many, explained, “So, yeah, this is all about management. So, most of the time, I tell you, when I decide to quit the job, it’s about the management.” My participants felt powerless in their attempts to adjust to unsatisfactory leadership and often used the nearest opportunity to escape to another job.

However, some individuals in my sample could tolerate job dissatisfaction and persist in their work adjustment attempts when changing jobs was particularly inconvenient or risky for them. They admitted to only staying in their schools for convenience or out of fear associated with transferring their work permits and visas. Thomas explained why changing jobs in China was so stressful: “The school can lord over us essentially with no punishment because we need a release letter to go to our next job.” Emily had been postponing a job change for years because of the risks involved in the process: “I know that there’s higher-paying jobs out there, but I just don’t wanna move [change jobs] because of the hassle of that.” One respondent admitted to only renewing their contract to avoid the lengthy process of transferring the work permit to a new employer, which would hinder their summer travel plans. They said, “I haven’t been at home for four years because of pandemic situation and would like to see my parents. They are elderly people, and I owe them a visit.”

Other employment aspects mentioned by some of my coinvestigators as potential reasons to quit were unequal treatment, discrimination, and increased workloads without more pay. None of the participants reported having factually left a job for these reasons. However, a few respondents admitted that, with time, they became less vulnerable to any job hardships. They

saw themselves quitting only for personal or political rather than job-related reasons. For example, Oliver observed: “I think things would bother me probably less than they would have done five years ago or 10 years ago.” Similarly, Michael perceived himself as immune to quitting when he said, “I don’t even know what would force me to quit my job.”

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. The chapter offered findings derived from data provided by 16 respondents who participated in the study through individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. The sample included individuals from different parts of the world and with varying degrees of teacher training and experience who taught different age groups and subjects in Chinese internationalized schools. Four major themes and 10 sub-themes summarized the respondents’ lived experiences.

The participants realized that behind the carefully crafted façade their schools tried to sell often lay deception, exploitation, and dedication to profit at the expense of teaching quality and employee well-being. They struggled to be acknowledged as real teachers and responded to their employers’ expectations by staying true to their beliefs and standards, showing initiative, trying to change their mindsets and expectations, or simply giving up. The respondents saw themselves in service of the paying customers: the students and their parents. While trying to stay true to their convictions, they strived to understand their learners and modify their teaching methods and classroom management practices to match their students’ needs and expectations. The participants had to adjust to working in multicultural work environments that heavily relied on Chinese work ethics. They struggled with the local management practices, the unsupportive local teachers, and the lack of unity among the expatriate staff.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. This chapter starts with a summary of findings and an interpretation of participants' lived experiences. Then, implications for policy and practice are described, followed by theoretical and empirical implications. The study's limitations and delimitations, recommendations for future research, and a summary conclude the chapter.

Discussion

The following sections discuss my study's findings and offer their interpretation. Sixteen expatriate teachers (ETs) employed in Chinese internationalized schools (CIS) for at least one school year shared their experiences of work adjustment in individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. The findings were ordered into four major themes: discovering what lies behind the façade, trying to be a real teacher, navigating relationships with the paying customers, and trying to function in a multicultural work environment.

Interpretation of Findings

When analyzing my findings and looking for interpretations of my participants' experiences, I found that the phenomenon of work adjustment in CIS could be explained with the basic psychological needs theory, a sub-theory of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT explains how satisfying or thwarting basic psychological needs influences people's growth, performance, and general well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Needs are perceived as "innate, organismic necessities rather than acquired motives" and include competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229).

Satisfying these needs leads to self-regulation and an individual's engagement in what is perceived as interesting and important (Schunk, 2020). People whose needs are met flourish, are full of vitality, experience a sense of integrity, and display signs of good mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

I realized that my participants' adjustment attempts and strategies clustered around and were often motivated by the unfulfilled needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Therefore, I interpreted my findings through the lens of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Moreover, as suggested by van Manen (1990, 2014), I considered my respondents' experiences from the perspective of the five existentials: spatiality, temporality, relationality, corporeality, and materiality.

Summary of Thematic Findings

My participants saw the image carefully crafted by their schools as a façade, behind which often lay deception, exploitation, and dedication to profit at the expense of teaching quality and employee well-being. High salaries and generous employment packages came at the price of heavy workloads, unpredictable teaching assignments, and impeded career mobility. Many respondents perceived themselves as marketing tools their schools needed, in Sara's words, "to give a higher fee." The role imposed on ETs in CIS often amounted to school mascots rather than real teachers.

The ETs in my sample responded to their employers' expectations by staying true to their beliefs and standards, showing initiative, or trying to change their mindsets and expectations. Some simply gave up, as explained by William: "I don't really care much already about, like, trying to make things right or stand up against the things that I'm not comfortable with or that seemed wrong to me. I mean, I know things are like that." The participants struggled with

teaching a mixed curriculum and teaching alongside the local teachers (LTs). Their instructional adjustments included rejecting the local ways, adapting to the local ways, and tuning in to student needs. Many of my participants cared deeply about their professional development and felt proud of their progress over the years. For example, Gabriel confessed, “If I see myself teaching the first year, I’ve learned a lot of things and I’ve changed a lot of things.”

My respondents saw themselves in service of their paying customers: the students and their parents. Although many enjoyed teaching children and witnessing their growth, complaints about the difficulty of working with the local students were common. For example, Anna described her struggles with misbehaving students the following way: “It’s like, you know, you have to stay in the cage with the kids who behave like wild animals.” The individuals in my sample did not blame the students for their actions but tried to understand the roots of misbehavior instead. Many modified their teaching methods and classroom management practices to match their learners’ needs and expectations. While few participants had direct contact with their students’ parents, many perceived the parents as a source of complaints and unreasonable expectations. For example, Laura admitted that “the requirements are too high from the parents.”

Working in CIS involved navigating multicultural work environments that heavily relied on Chinese work ethics. Communication was often inefficient and hindered by language and cultural barriers. For example, Stefan lamented, “When we organizing something, hoooh, all those troubles because of bad communication, language barrier, having to work with the teacher who cannot speak any English.” The local management and the LTs were often perceived as incompetent and unsupportive. When dealing with the LTs, my respondents stayed persistent, tried to change the LTs, compromised with them, or avoided them. Many participants

complained about the lack of unity among the expatriate staff in their schools. For example, Gabriel said, “I try to see the most objective way, but sometimes you find colleagues that take it, take things so personal, and it’s quite difficult because they put, or they give priority to things that don’t help our unity.”

The Need for Relatedness. In SDT, relatedness describes the human desire to connect to others, love, and be loved (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Expatriate adjustment in China is often influenced by cultural differences, the language barrier, and a lack of meaningful relationships (Cai & Su, 2021; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022; Y. Liu & Self, 2020). Many of my participants were in constant transition, living far away from home and regularly changing jobs and cities, so their relationships were often fleeting. Oliver admitted, “There’s teachers that come for one year, and then they leave. So, it’s a case of, every year, there’s a new kind of intake of teachers.” Language and cultural barriers hindered the contact with the locals, even for those participants who spent many years in one job. It is, thus, not surprising that many of my coinvestigators’ work adjustment strategies reflected the need for relatedness, belonging to a community, having supportive people to rely on, and receiving affection from those around them.

My participants’ need for belonging manifested in seeking relationships with their coworkers. Organizational culture has been shown to influence the work adjustment of general expatriate groups (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021), but the relationships with Chinese coworkers might be difficult for Westerners due to cultural differences and frequent misunderstandings (Cai & Su, 2021; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Schartner et al., 2023). Stories of a divide between LTs and ETs were frequent in my data and commonly appeared in the extant literature (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Kostogriz &

Bonar, 2019; Poole, 2021). Those respondents who worked closely with the LTs reported compromising with their teaching partners, even against their convictions, for the sake of rapport. For example, Devon described his attempts to find common ground with his teaching partner, “I’m trying to, you know, balance a little bit. Like, OK, let’s do yours and see how it goes. Because your plan is not really what I want.”

However, adjusting to LTs’ ways and standards often proved challenging and required sacrifices. Hindered communication with the LTs might lead to ETs’ feelings of disappointment and frustration (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). My coinvestigators often struggled with the Chinese face culture and saw their local coworkers’ behavior as dishonesty, duplicity, or backstabbing rather than attempts to save face. For example, Nicole lamented that her local colleagues “would rather, instead of speaking to you one on one as an adult –you would think that it’s like a normal thing to do– they would rather go and talk about it to someone else.” Feeling rejected or betrayed by the LTs led some of my participants to resent and avoid them, a phenomenon common for expatriates interacting with Chinese coworkers (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; C. H. Williams, 2017).

Expatriates generally prefer to socialize within the international community rather than with the host country nationals (E. Cohen, 1977; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; Murdock, 2022; Peltokorpi & Zhang, 2020; Reade & McKenna, 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). It is, thus, surprising that many of my respondents reported a lack of unity among the ETs in their schools. Although attempts to socialize with international coworkers and build an expatriate community at work were a common desire, many feared being exploited by their expatriate coworkers.

Indeed, the atmosphere of unhealthy competition in some CIS exacerbated my participants' protectiveness and led them to count on themselves.

As coworker support at my participants' schools was often insufficient, an unfulfilled need for belonging at work was common. However, many participants spent more time with their students than the other teachers. In the absence of meaningful relationships with the adults, some respondents tried to fulfill their need for relatedness through their relationships with the students and by winning student affection. A few participants admitted that their students were their only source of job satisfaction and the only meaningful human connection at work. For example, Martha confessed, "Oh, you know, actually this is my only satisfaction. Students are my only satisfaction." Caring for the relationships with the students became apparent in my respondents' attempts to understand and attune to their learners, investing in teacher-student rapport, trying to remember student names, and even using incentives to win student affection. Prior research confirmed that student progress and classroom synergy constituted a source of job satisfaction for ETs, but poor discipline often led to dissatisfaction and frustration (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019).

The Need for Competence. Competence describes an individual's perceived sense of effectiveness and mastery (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For some participants, working as an ET in CIS involved being school mascots without the expectation for real teaching. Gabriel explained, "Of course, they tell you to prepare, to do it professionally, but at the end, by facts, by reality, you notice how they don't really care about those things." Some of my coinvestigators taught extracurricular or second-rank subjects without much relevance for their students, and they felt that their presence at school was mostly for show. This finding is consistent with the extant literature and the frequent reports of ETs feeling marginalized and undervalued (Bunnell &

Poole, 2022; Everitt, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Murdock, 2022; Wigford & Higgins, 2019).

However, it was evident in many of my respondents' statements that they desperately wanted to be acknowledged as real teachers, matter in their schools, and show their competence and professionalism. Laura said, "So, I just showed them that I'm a teacher as well, and I have a serious attitude to my work. That I'm responsible, and yeah, they should consider me as well." While some gave up and resorted to doing the bare minimum, many tried to change their attitude and accept the imposed role and even include some of the local teaching methods. Others persisted in following their beliefs and teaching standards against the local expectations. Mentions of instructional adjustments undertaken by expatriate educators and the differences in instructional philosophies and practices in the West and East were reported in previous research (Fernández-Álvarez et al., 2022; Sachdej, 2018; Ye & Edwards, 2017).

The need for competence could also explain the many attempts at professional development mentioned by my participants. Being undervalued, diminished in their roles, and not taken seriously, my respondents needed to feel competent and prove to themselves and others that they were real teachers. The value of professional development for ETs has been frequently mentioned in previous research (Anning, 2020; Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Stroud Stasel, 2021, 2022). Obtaining advanced degrees and additional teaching qualifications, even without the schools' support, allowed my respondents to feel competent. For example, Emily, who had recently been working toward her second additional teacher credential, admitted, "But it's not something that I need here, but I choose to do it because I want to further my own learning." Many participants also reported that their teaching and classroom

management skills improved over the years, and it was apparent how proud and empowered they felt about their professional growth and the little victories in their classroom struggles.

Trying to show competence despite the diminished role could also be observed in my participants' dealings with the other teachers at their schools. Some reported their attempts to stay persistent when teaching alongside the LTs or even trying to reform the LTs' instructional methods. Previous research showed that ETs often misunderstand Chinese education and perceive local teaching methods as inferior (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Woods & Kong, 2020). Many of my participants seemed unaware that the LTs' instructional choices did not necessarily reflect laziness or lack of teaching skills but were a response to the local demands of the profession. Lecturing, insisting on textbook memorization, and test paper drilling, approaches that my participants criticized as old-fashioned and ineffective, showed LTs' attempts to be good teachers in their context, which is a teacher- and textbook-centered school system that views exam success as the ultimate goal of education (Soong & Stahl, 2023; C. H. Williams, 2017).

Working harder than others and trying to improve workplace efficiency were other strategies employed by my participants to fulfill the need for competence in their competitive workplaces. Nicole explained, "Whatever it was that they needed from me, I did try my best to go above and beyond to do that. Volunteering to do things, you know, doing extra work." Moreover, the need for competence manifested in the desire to be credited for own work. Some participants admitted that they feared their work being stolen by lazy or incompetent coworkers. They felt exploited because their efforts went unnoticed, or others were credited for their work. For example, Jane said, "There are people in the office that, I'm just gonna say, they're not good, they have no clue what they are doing. ... I feel they want to piggyback on someone else's back."

The Need for Autonomy. Autonomy involves volition and behavior that is not externally controlled or restricted (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Previous research showed that organizational culture and role clarity influenced how effectively expatriate employees adjusted (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021). Having a clear job description and feeling in charge of one's work arrangements rather than being micromanaged or required to follow ever-changing requirements was a desire expressed by many of my participants. Some mentioned the freedom that resulted from having their own classroom and arranging it according to their needs and preferences. Others proudly mentioned the freedom they had in their teaching. They valued it despite the effort needed to design their own curricula or plan lessons from scratch without textbooks. For example, Thomas admitted, "I'm also issued quite a lot of freedom in my job to teach what I see fit, which is quite important to me." The autonomy made the job worthwhile, but some also admitted that they had to earn their supervisors' trust before being afforded a degree of independence. However, teaching freedom was never limitless, and reports of curricular restrictions and censored content were also present in my respondents' accounts, as they are in the extant literature (Bunnell, 2022; Ihejieta, 2020).

The need for autonomy manifested in several aspects of my participants' work adjustment. Many insisted on teaching the way they felt was right, that is, in a fun, interactive, and hands-on way, focusing on skill building and projects. My coinvestigators' instructional choices often contradicted the local teaching methods. For example, Jane, who tried teaching according to her LTs suggestions for the first two weeks, decided to return to her preferred, fun teaching style when she realized that "the kids don't really enjoy what I'm doing, and even me, I feel uncomfortable walking to the class, delivering a lesson that I know is not what I do." ETs' reliance on Western teaching methods, their perceptions of Chinese education as inferior, and

their disregard for local students' learning styles have been common in previous research (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; C. H. Williams, 2017; Woods & Kong, 2020).

The lack of proficiency in host country language can become an obstacle to expatriate work adjustment (Asif et al., 2020; Harry et al., 2019; Schartner et al., 2023). In China, ETs might feel excluded from their schools' communication channels due to their lack of Mandarin proficiency (Poole, 2020b). A few of my participants indeed understood the value of speaking Mandarin and felt silenced when their words were not translated truthfully by their LTs. Learning some Mandarin helped them communicate with their coworkers, students, and the students' parents without the need to rely on LTs' translations. For example, Emily regretted not speaking more Mandarin because "from what I know now, I know that some [LTs] do not translate things properly." In other words, Mandarin skills were seen as a path to autonomy and independence from the LTs.

The Five Existentials. The five existentials of spatiality, temporality, relationality, corporeality, and materiality were suggested by van Manen (1990, 2014) as necessary for a phenomenological investigation. The existentials shape the essential composition of the lifeworld and cannot be separated from phenomenological reflection because they form the lived experiences of all people (van Manen, 1990). Considering my coinvestigators' relationships with space, time, other people, their own bodies, and material things allowed me to deepen my understanding of their work adjustment.

My participants' experiences of work adjustment referred to specific sites, namely, the internationalized schools where they were employed. On the one hand, my participants generally expressed their satisfaction with their schools' impressive facilities and amenities, so the school

space appeared to be a benefit of working in CIS. On the other hand, many perceived their place of employment as foreign. The foreignness became apparent in most respondents' spontaneous word choices when talking about their schools: "they" rather than "we" and "the school" or "this school" rather than "my school" or "our school." A few participants did not identify with their schools and treated them merely as a source of income. One respondent admitted, "It's not really my school, it's just a place I work at now to pay the bills." A lack of attachment to the place of employment is common for expatriate employees (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Poole, 2020c; Wechtler et al., 2023). For my participants, feeling like an outsider might have resulted from perceptions of being hired help rather than real teachers, a rejection of the local authoritative management style, having limited access to information, or an awareness of the transient nature of employment in China.

For many of my coinvestigators, temporality or lived time meant accepting the precarity of being in constant flux, but also being restricted in their career mobility choices. For some, planning a job change caused anxiety due to the requirement to obtain a release letter from the current employer. For others, the present was the only thing that could be relied on because the transient status of expatriate employees, the lack of embeddedness in China, and frequent planned or unplanned job changes made preparing for the future difficult. Even those participants who stayed in one school for many years felt no stability because the schools and their leadership constantly changed, a complaint common for ETs in different contexts (Everitt, 2020; Murdock, 2022). Every school year could potentially bring extreme changes to employees' working conditions because, as Emily stated, everything "depended on who the boss is." Therefore, temporality manifested for my participants in a precarity of their positions and an inability to plan for the future. The notion of a precarity in expatriates' professional and personal lives has

been commonly discussed in the extant literature (Bunnell, 2016, 2022; Chou, 2021; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Poole, 2020b).

The fleetingness and uncertainty also influenced relationality, that is, lived human relation. My participants' relationships at work were determined by high staff turnover and the inability to build lasting, meaningful bonds with coworkers, a finding confirmed repeatedly in previous research (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Cai & Su, 2021; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021, 2022; Kostogriz et al., 2022; Y. Liu & Self, 2020; Stroud Stasel, 2022). Oliver explained, "In the nature of international schools is that people come and go, don't they?" Many complained about not having people they could rely on because of the divide between LTs and ETs and the lack of unity among the expatriate staff.

Relationships with students constituted an important aspect of the employment experience in several previous studies of expatriate educators (Asif et al., 2020; Burford et al., 2020; Lamers-Reeuwijk et al., 2020; Schartner et al., 2023; Wilkins & Neri, 2019). My participants clearly cared about their relationships with their learners, tried to understand them, and find ways to reach them in the classroom. The many attempts to modify teaching and classroom management practices reflected my respondents' desire to be effective teachers, but also to respond to student needs and learning styles. It might be that some respondents compensated for their feelings of isolation by building rapport with their students and looking for student affection.

Many schools in China show specific preferences for ETs. Unequal treatment and discriminatory hiring practices in the international school industry have been documented in previous research (Beek, 2023; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Dos Santos, 2020, 2022). Corporeality, or lived body, often meant for my participants a reliance

on their foreign appearance for employability and status in their schools. The participants who are White often realized they could, in Anna's words, "easily find a job with the click of fingers." In contrast, the participants who are Black, Latino, or Asian felt they might experience unequal treatment even if they work harder than others. For example, William, who is ethnically Chinese, explained that he had been "rejected by several schools" because the management had looked "for a Western-face feature."

Materiality, that is, lived things and technology, can also determine people's experiences of the world (van Manen, 2014). A few of my participants mentioned objects and technologies that influenced the quality of their work. The absence of textbooks in many of my respondents' classrooms was a difficult adjustment that forced additional preparation time. However, some spoke of generously equipped classrooms that made their teaching effective and offered the students an opportunity for hands-on learning. Others complained about the lack of the necessary equipment or even reported paying for teaching aids with their own money. Martha confessed, "I spent a lot of money for my stuff, for my materials. ... You know, this school said, oh yes, oh, it's beautiful, wow, great idea, maybe we'll pay you back. But have never done it." Moreover, one participant spoke of the benefits of staying connected with coworkers through digital technologies.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of my study present the work adjustment of ETs in CIS as a series of struggles, disappointments, and necessary compromises. Some of the identified challenges require special attention because of their strong impact on ETs, their students, and the industry in general. In the following sections, implications for policy and practice are presented with their explanations and justifications.

Implications for Policy

Obtaining a Chinese work permit constitutes a challenge for many expatriate employees (InterNations, 2023). The current Chinese work permit system is often detrimental to the career mobility of ETs because it requires every employee to receive a release letter from the current employer before being able to transfer the work permit to a new company. The system is designed to tightly control personnel flow and ensure that international staff in China do not leave their employers without notice or due process. However, this system also affords employers excessive power over employees who intend to quit, which might lead to abuse. For example, employers might intentionally delay issuing an employee's release letter to interfere with their timely work permit transfer. Consequences might involve the need for an employee to leave China, prepare a new set of application documents, including some that require several months to process, and apply for a new work visa from their home country.

Legal protections for ETs have often been insufficient in China (Bunnell, 2016; Kostogriz et al., 2022). Some of my participants mentioned that employers might use the threat of withholding the release letter to blackmail or intimidate employees or even deter them from leaving a job. Legal assistance against this and other abuses has often been ineffective. Labor arbitration committees have no legal power over the offending employers and might be unprepared to deal with expatriate employees and their unique problems. Taking legal steps costs time and money and does not guarantee a fair outcome. To prevent abuse, encourage schools' commitment to healthy employee retention efforts, and foster advantageous career mobility in the industry, the work permit transfer system for ETs should be modified. Moreover, legal assistance for expatriate employees should be made more accessible.

Implications for Practice

Based on my participants' accounts of work adjustment and the extant literature, I formulated six implications for practice that respond to the most common challenges in CIS. Most of these implications should be addressed by school leadership, which is the strongest factor in the work adjustment, job satisfaction, and retention of ETs. The suggestions specifically pertain to leadership style, performance feedback, human resources management, adequate professional development, school-wide classroom management systems, and the divide between LTs and ETs.

The Paramount Role of School Leadership Style. The impact of school management style on the job satisfaction, well-being, and retention of ETs has been thoroughly documented (Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; Wigford & Higgins, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). My research confirms that weak leadership in CIS is a widespread complaint, constitutes a difficult adjustment, and is one of the most frequent reasons ETs quit a job. Moreover, the Chinese cultural influences on management practices, such as emphasis on hierarchy, indirect contact, and saving face, might evoke strong opposition in ETs and significantly impede their work adjustment. The paramount role of competent, respectful, fair, and culturally adequate management for ET adjustment and well-being cannot be stressed enough.

Expectation for Performance Feedback. Language and cultural barriers often influence ETs' access to information in their schools. A consequence of the face culture might be that critical feedback on employee performance is not shared directly with the teacher or is shared in a culturally incomprehensible manner. Moreover, because of the marginal role ETs play in some CIS, personnel management standards for them might be less developed than for the LTs (Everitt, 2020; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020a, 2020c). Indeed, some

of my participants wished they received more feedback on their performance, or any feedback at all, and were informed of their yearly assessment scores. Some even felt that the management's personnel decisions, such as salary raises, yearly bonuses, or promotions, were biased and unfair because clear assessment criteria were missing. Therefore, CIS should provide transparent performance standards for expatriate employees parallel to those designed for the LTs. The schools should also ensure that ETs, like the LTs, receive regular, specific feedback on their performance, including information on their strengths and weaknesses and directions for long-term growth.

Transparency in Human Resources Management. Reports of unfair hiring practices and complaints about unequal treatment based on employee demographics have been common in the international school industry (Beek, 2023; Bunnell & Gardner-McTaggart, 2022; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Dos Santos, 2020, 2022; Ihejieta, 2020). Some of my participants mentioned unequal treatment and unfair salary disparities based on ET demographics. Therefore, school-level policies adding transparency and fairness to recruitment practices and human resource management should be encouraged. In particular, it might benefit employee adjustment, well-being, and retention if CIS make their salary standards and career advancement schemes known to all employees so compensation and promotion cannot be arbitrarily decided.

Adequate Professional Development. Most of my participants judged their schools' professional development offers as insufficient or inadequate, a finding that is confirmed in the extant literature (Everitt, 2020; Fong, 2018; T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Harry et al., 2019; Roskell, 2013; Wilkins & Annabi, 2023). Some even saw their employers as unsupportive of their growth. Considering ETs' unique needs in CIS, adequate in-service training should become a regular part of the job. Training for LTs and ETs should be combined to promote faculty

integration whenever possible. Furthermore, opportunities to observe other faculty members' lessons and be observed should be created. The professional development offer might include diverse aspects of ETs' work, such as classroom management, teaching methods, or local and international curriculum standards.

Zhu and Li (2020) posited that considering Chinese education standards through the lens of Western experiences is inadequate. They argued that the Chinese classroom model of collective individualism is rooted in Chinese history and culture. However, ETs often criticize the Chinese teaching methods that rely on test preparation, rote memorization, and knowledge transmission rather than discovery (Bunnell, 2016; Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Soong & Stahl, 2023; Woods & Kong, 2020). Some ETs might misunderstand the reasons for LTs' authoritative role, and many lack awareness of the local curricula, even for their subjects (C. H. Williams, 2017). Disregard for local students' learning styles is also common for ETs (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019; C. H. Williams, 2017). Consequently, the integration of local and international curricula that CIS market to their customers often fails. Considering the need of many ETs for competence in their challenging work environments, training should be provided to international faculty members about the local curricula and educational objectives. Moreover, understanding the local classroom culture, students' learning styles, and the rationale for LTs' instructional choices could positively influence ETs' work adjustment and teaching effectiveness.

United Discipline Efforts. While student progress is a source of job satisfaction for many ETs, poor classroom discipline and disrespectful students often lead to their frustration and even quitting a job (T. Han & Mahzoun, 2017; Ihejieta, 2020; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). My participants believed their struggles with classroom management in CIS resulted from the

difficulty of managing students who do not speak enough English, are tired and overworked, lack sufficient parental care, or have unaddressed disabilities and special needs. Many of my respondents emphasized the need for their schools to implement uniform discipline systems or codes of conduct that would standardize all teachers' classroom management practices. Detailed guidelines for handling student misbehavior should be designed, formulated bilingually, and consistently implemented. Moreover, the schools should provide their faculties with ongoing classroom management training.

Bridging the Divide Between Expatriate and Local Teachers. Language and cultural barriers in CIS might prevent the integration of local and international faculty members, leading to avoidance, lack of cooperation, and even resentment between the two teacher groups (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Kostogriz & Bonar, 2019). ETs might lack an understanding of LTs' work ethics and instructional methods, while their local coworkers might feel threatened by the ETs and perceive their treatment as privileged and unfair (Bunnell & Poole, 2022; Mok & Chan, 2020; Poole, 2020a; C. H. Williams, 2017). A healthy school climate in CIS requires bridging the divide between the two teacher groups. Involving ETs in subject meetings and curriculum planning can lead to an exchange of ideas, allow all faculty members to have a voice, increase in-house expertise, and improve the teaching effectiveness in CIS. Management and human resources workers should strive to make ETs active members of their teams and departments and, when necessary, facilitate Mandarin learning opportunities for the ETs and English learning opportunities for the LTs. Above all, English proficiency should be considered when hiring LTs in CIS. At the very least, subject group leaders, grade leaders, and any LTs in leadership positions working in mixed-hire schools should be able to communicate freely in English.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section addresses the theoretical and empirical implications of my research. First, I discuss my study's extended theoretical framework and consider the nuances of the definition of CIS. I then describe the methodological implications of my recruitment and sampling choices. Lastly, I share my insight about the financial side of ETs' employment in CIS.

Extended Theoretical Framework

When planning my study, I considered various theories and conceptual frameworks. A desire for clarity and transparency motivated me to select one comprehensive theory, the theory of work adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), to aid my research design and guide my research questions. My findings added to the applications of TWA, extended its use to a qualitative context, and confirmed its process model (Dawis, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). However, during my data analysis, I discovered that another theory, Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory of motivation, explained a nuance in my findings that TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) did not account for. Moreover, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) aided the interpretation of my findings as I discovered the correspondence of my participants' adjustment strategies to the three basic psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Theory of Work Adjustment. I employed TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) as my theoretical framework. The theory offers an extensive platform for exploring adjustment in professional settings and posits that employees experiencing job dissatisfaction do not immediately quit their jobs but attempt work adjustment first. The TWA process model (Dawis, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) employs style variables of activeness, reactivity, flexibility, and perseverance to explain the work adjustment process. Flexibility is the degree of

dissatisfaction tolerated before attempting adjustment, and perseverance reflects how long an individual persists in work adjustment before leaving the job (Dawis, 2005). Activeness involves an individual's attempts to change the work environment, while reactiveness captures the attempts to change the self to restore job satisfaction.

My study extended the overwhelmingly quantitative applications of TWA to a qualitative setting and addressed the demand for novel research approaches to validating the theory (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2018; Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Fouad, 2020). By viewing work adjustment through a phenomenological lens as lived experiences rather than correlated variables, support for the theory became more robust (Dawis, 2005). Moreover, as no instruments have yet been developed to measure the style variables, the results of my study can potentially support an attempt to create such an instrument (Dawis, 2005; Swanson & Schneider, 2021). However, my findings cannot be explained with TWA alone. Two further theories proved beneficial in explicating the work adjustment of ETs in CIS.

A surprising finding of my study, and one that adds nuance to TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), was that school leadership constituted a unique aspect of my participants' adjustment experiences and was a pivotal factor for almost all respondents. Other facets of adjustment, such as coworkers, students, or instructional methods, led my participants to change their environment (activeness) or attitudes and expectations (reactiveness). My respondents' perseverance in these adjustments was relatively high, that is, they attempted their adjustments in several ways and for an extended time until a satisfactory change in the environment was reached (activeness) or their expectations changed (reactiveness). However, this approach did not apply to their adjustments to dissatisfactory leadership.

Almost all participants saw dissatisfactory leadership as the prime factor that would push them to quit their jobs unconditionally, and many confessed that their previous job changes were caused by frustration with the school management. Anna explained why management was “make or break” for her: “If the management of the company is really poor and not up to the standard, then it makes your life incredibly bad, and you just cannot find any inner strength to stay there, you know, and fight.” It can be concluded that my participants showed low perseverance in adjusting to dissatisfactory management. Consequently, the factor of school leadership needs to be excluded from the TWA process model (Dawis, 1996; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) for my sample and, potentially, all ETs in CIS. However, this nuance has a clear explanation in Herzberg’s (1968) two-factor theory of motivation.

Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory of Motivation. The two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg, 1968) explored employee satisfaction to explain retention and attrition at the workplace. Herzberg posited that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were coexisting states, not the opposite ends of a continuum. Therefore, employees could simultaneously be satisfied with some aspects of their jobs and dissatisfied with others. Herzberg found that the presence of hygiene factors, among them company administration and supervision, did not lead to job satisfaction. However, their absence caused job dissatisfaction, potentially leading employees to leave the company. In other words, satisfactory management was essential for employees’ motivation to work. Other hygiene factors in Herzberg’s model included, among others, company policy, professional relationships, work conditions, and salary. However, in my study, dissatisfaction with these employment aspects did not lead the participants to quit their jobs but only triggered adjustment attempts.

Self-Determination Theory. Another theory added to the understanding of my study's findings, namely SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). During my data analysis, I discovered that my participants' experiences of work adjustment clustered around and were often motivated by the unfulfilled needs for community and belonging, professional recognition and expertise, and independence. These needs correspond to relatedness, competence, and autonomy forming the basic needs theory, a sub-theory of SDT. Competence describes an individual's perceived sense of effectiveness and mastery (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy involves volition and behavior that is not externally controlled or restricted. Relatedness, a concept added to advance Deci and Ryan's (1985) initial two-factor cognitive evaluation theory, emphasizes the human desire to connect to others, love, and be loved (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT posits that the needs manifest in various behaviors, and their satisfaction is necessary for healthy human development. Employing the lens of SDT helped me interpret my participants' work adjustment in CIS as attempts to satisfy the three basic psychological needs.

Defining Chinese Internationalized Schools

The great diversification in the Chinese international school landscape complicates defining what does and does not constitute CIS (Bunnell & Hatch, 2021; Wright et al., 2022; Wu, 2020; Wu & Koh, 2022). Different organizational forms can be encountered in the industry, for example, state or private bilingual schools, state schools with international departments, local-foreign cooperatives, and schools with international and internationalized departments (Beek, 2023; Kim, 2019). A clear definition of CIS was crucial for my research design and participant recruitment. After conducting a literature review and including my personal experiences in the industry, I initially defined a Chinese internationalized school, in accord with Poole (2020a), as a type of nontraditional international school in China characterized by a blend

of local and international curricula delivered by local and expatriate educators, the coexistence of Mandarin Chinese and English as languages of instruction, and a homogenous student body consisting of children from local middle-class families.

I tested the definition on my own place of employment and some of my acquaintances' schools and initially found it adequate. However, before finalizing my IRB application, during a conversation with an acquaintance whom I planned to later invite to my study, I discovered an important nuance that I had previously overlooked. The acquaintance worked in a private school with an international department for expatriate students and an internationalized department for local students. However, the latter also enrolled foreign passport holders whose English proficiency was insufficient for the international department. I learned that it is common in internationalized schools to encounter children of expatriate parents who grew up in China without speaking English at home or children who grew up in local families but held foreign passports due to their parents' birth tourism or previous stays abroad. Although these students might qualify for enrollment in traditional international schools because of their passport status, they do not necessarily meet the English proficiency standards set by most traditional international schools.

Consequently, I decided to clarify the definition of CIS used in my research by adding that the schools were characterized by a homogenous student body consisting *mainly* of children from local middle-class families. This timely modification proved helpful because later, during my sampling and data collection, several participants mentioned teaching some students who were either the children of other ETs employed in their schools or expatriate children from the neighboring Asian countries who chose CIS over traditional international schools for various reasons. While discussions about the definition and boundaries of CIS remain valid in the ever-

changing Chinese education landscape, the homogeneity of the student body in these schools should perhaps be excluded from the definition.

The Difficulty of Sampling Expatriate Teachers

ETs might be considered an exceptionally difficult population for scholarly research. Despite the constant expansion of the international school industry, educator samples in expatriate adjustment studies have mostly been limited to academics (Burford et al., 2020; Koh & Sin, 2020; Schartner et al., 2023; Wilkins & Annabi, 2023). My study confirmed that finding ETs willing to spare their time and engagement for research is challenging, perhaps more challenging than it would be to recruit national teachers. I started my participant pool with a convenience sample of individuals I knew from the Chinese expatriate community. To avoid the issues of power imbalance, coercive pressure, and the deference effect, I did not recruit individuals who were my close friends, coworkers, or subordinates (Bernard, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hennink et al., 2020; Howitt, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2020). I mostly encountered positive reactions to my research. Three potential candidates refused my invitation to join the study, but one changed their mind later and contacted me to participate after all. Out of the eight invited candidates, six agreed to participate.

I continued recruiting further participants through snowball sampling, that is, by asking each respondent to identify others who met my participation criteria (Ary et al., 2019). This sampling method was justified by the insufficient statistical data about ETs in China, which made any other sampling strategy implausible. I did not want to recruit all my participants through convenience sampling to avoid excessive researcher influence on sample composition. I acknowledge that convenience sampling coupled with snowball sampling did lead me to my goal of maximum variation and inclusion of at least two key informants (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Patton, 2022; Schreier, 2018). However, I feel obliged to share my experiences with snowball sampling in the population of ETs.

I had hoped that each of the initial participants recruited through convenience sampling would lead me to at least one further participant through snowball sampling. This expectation was not confirmed, and some participants acted anxious or avoided responding to me when I repeated my request for participant recommendations. I realized that two factors might have determined some individuals' reluctance to lead me to further respondents. First, some might have feared disclosing their participation in my study to anyone, which is understandable for those who discussed delicate employment issues in their interviews. Second, some respondents might only have been able to recommend participants working in their schools because their social circles did not include any other eligible candidates. They might have felt uncomfortable with a researcher comparing their accounts and experiences with those of a coworker from the same school and a researcher having a closer look at or a second opinion of their places of employment.

Another shortcoming of snowball sampling in my study was the fact that some participants provided recommendations of individuals who were very similar to them in terms of age, gender, nationality, or ethnicity. This is unsurprising, considering that people generally prefer to socialize with similar individuals, but it contradicted my goal of maximum variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Koppelman, 2020; Schaefer, 2019). In the absence of more viable sampling methods, convenience sampling combined with snowball sampling proved effective because my final sample met all my expectations, showed great diversity in most aspects, and included key informants. However, I admit that my data collection progressed much more slowly

than anticipated, occasionally leading to my frustration. When considering further research with ETs, the above limitations of snowball sampling should be carefully considered.

It Really Is All About the Money

The literature on the Chinese international school industry emphasizes the for-profit nature of CIS and contrasts the operational model of internationalized schools with that of local public schools and traditional international schools (Poole, 2020a; Poole & Bunnell, 2021). My study confirmed this distinction. Most of my participants complained about their schools' commitment to profit and were appalled by the degree of commercialization and customer service in their institutions. For example, Thomas observed that "the level to which these [Chinese internationalized] schools focus on profit is borderline predatory." It was clear that most of my respondents believed in free, adequate education for every child. Many could not accept that their schools charged high tuition fees without providing even a fraction of the quality these fees should buy.

My respondents became expatriate teachers in China for various reasons, but not all were transparent about their motivations. At the beginning of their interviews, most mentioned expecting a new challenge, wanting to travel and experience new cultures, or escaping the dissatisfying realities of their home countries and previous careers, which Michael called "a reset button." Some, like William, only stated that "opportunities opened up" for them. However, later in their interviews, most respondents admitted or implied that their primary motivation to remain in China was the high salary. Even those who cared about more than the money when they first arrived admitted that the financial side soon became essential to their perseverance in CIS, and shopping for higher-paying job offers was common among my respondents. It is, thus,

interesting to view my participants' complaints about their schools' focus on money in light of their own focus on money. I conclude that in CIS, it really is all about the money indeed.

Limitations and Delimitations

The research method choice might be seen as a limitation of my study. I selected hermeneutical phenomenology over transcendental phenomenology because the former is interpretive-oriented and allows utilizing the researcher's familiarity with the phenomenon under study (Vagle, 2018). My position as an industry insider helped me create rapport with my participants and better understand their experiences. However, it might also have influenced the interpretation of my results because I was familiar with and empathetic toward some of their feelings and experiences. To delimit my influence on the study, I made my researcher positionality known to the consumer of my research report and strictly adhered to the recommended procedures of data collection and analysis (Ary et al., 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2021). I employed numerous trustworthiness strategies, such as member checking, member reflections, negative case analysis, audit trail, and triangulation, to ensure my participants' experiences were presented accurately (Ary et al., 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another obvious limitation is the voluntary nature of participation in qualitative research (Howitt, 2019; Tracy, 2020). The time demand for the participants was high. They had to commit to spending about three to four hours to complete all data collection procedures, including member checking their interview transcripts and member reflections on a summary of my findings. Because opportunities to be heard are rare for ETs in China, it is possible that some informants had ulterior motives to join my study. For example, some might have looked for an opportunity to expose the unfairness in their schools or take revenge on a supervisor rather than

merely share their work adjustment experiences. I used semi-structured individual interviews and followed a specific interview protocol as a delimitation measure. Moreover, I employed free imaginative variation to validate the necessity of individual findings for the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

In my study, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Technology use constituted a potential limitation because online conversations might have felt less natural to my participants, and I might have been unable to read their reactions and nonverbal cues as easily as in face-to-face communication. Moreover, technical issues might have been a challenge for some. However, I was aware that most ETs in China were familiar with online conferencing due to the three-year-long COVID-19 restrictions in China. As a delimitation measure, I provided the opportunity to conduct individual interviews face-to-face, an option none of the participants requested. I ensured the length of each conversation did not exceed 60 minutes, so the interviewees remained engaged and focused. My coinvestigators had an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts through member checking. Moreover, I provided a simple tutorial on using Microsoft Teams in case some individuals were unfamiliar with the software.

To ensure that all my participants had rich experience with the phenomenon of work adjustment, I included the criterion of at least a year's tenure in CIS in my recruitment plan. As a result, one aspect of my sample composition became a limitation of my study. Due to the three-year-long COVID-19 border restrictions in China, I was unable to recruit any participants who had been working in CIS for less than three years. Consequently, my sample was skewed toward individuals with longer tenure, and my findings lack the experiences of ETs who recently started their careers in the Chinese international school industry.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study filled a gap in research about the work adjustment experiences of ETs employed in CIS and added to the understanding of international educators' professional lives. Although my findings provide valuable insight, much is still to be learned. More research with ET samples is needed as this ever-growing professional group remains understudied (Bailey & Cooker, 2019; Koh & Sin, 2020; Murdock, 2022; Poole, 2020b; Stroud Stasel, 2022).

Due to the qualitative nature of my study and the small sample size, the generalizability of my findings is limited, and conclusions about the frequency and intensity of specific adjustment experiences could not be drawn. I recommend conducting large-scale quantitative research to confirm the prevalence of ETs' work adjustment experiences and strategies in CIS. For example, it might be interesting to research the correlations between ETs' demographic or personal variables, such as the level of education, length of tenure, or self-efficacy with adjustment strategy choices. Moreover, it might warrant further study to investigate the adjustments undertaken by different expatriate types, for example by investigating if and how explorers, mercenaries, architects, and refugees vary in their adjustment attitudes and strategies (J. Richardson & McKenna, 2002).

The unique role of school leadership in the work adjustment of ETs, an important finding in my study, should be further examined. Management style was a pivotal factor for my participants and the most common reason for quitting a job. As the unusually high ET turnover constitutes one of the biggest problems for the sustainability of CIS (Bunnell & Poole, 2023; Kostogriz et al., 2022), I recommend researching qualitatively what specific leadership features push ETs to give up their adjustment attempts. It might also be interesting to understand ETs' conceptualizations of effective management.

Consistently with TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), my findings confirmed job dissatisfaction as the starting point of work adjustment attempts. Although the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of ETs in CIS are not well understood, a wealth of studies with national teacher samples can assist in designing research with ET samples. Understanding the factors causing job satisfaction and dissatisfaction and ETs' coping strategies could potentially be achieved with a grounded theory methodology.

Because of the three-year-long COVID-19 border restrictions in China, the sample in my study only included ETs with three or more years of tenure in the industry. However, the work adjustment experiences of newcomers might differ from those of individuals with longer tenure, and different survival strategies might manifest. It is, thus, recommended to further study, through a phenomenological lens, the experiences of ETs after their first year of employment in China. These experiences could supplement my findings or provide new insight into the work adjustment of ETs.

Studies offering in-depth and context-bound knowledge about the professional lives of ETs are rare. During my data collection, I met several individuals who had rich experience in China and many exciting stories to tell about working in Chinese schools. Researching these experiences could add to the limited understanding of ETs' struggles in China. I recommend the case study approach as particularly suitable for gaining a deeper understanding of ETs' professional journeys. In particular, researching extreme cases can add nuance to the limited knowledge base.

Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools. I conducted a

thorough literature review that included four major research streams constituting the background of the study: international education, expatriate educators, their job satisfaction, and their work adjustment. I identified the research problem as the job dissatisfaction of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools leading to work adjustment. I described the historical, social, and theoretical context of the problem and articulated the study's theoretical, empirical, and practical significance. My theoretical framework included the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) that guided the research design and the formulation of the research questions.

I chose van Manen's (1990, 2014) hermeneutical phenomenology as a suitable research design because it allowed me to answer my research questions and utilize my familiarity with the phenomenon under study. I collected data from 16 expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools for at least one school year through individual interviews, written protocols, and focus groups. I adhered to the recommended procedures of data collection and analysis and the highest standards of research ethics. The data collected from my participants amounted to over 600 standard pages of text and led to the formulation of four major themes: discovering what lies behind the façade, trying to be a real teacher, navigating relationships with the paying customers, and trying to function in a multicultural work environment.

I interpreted my participants' work adjustment through the lens of Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory as attempts to satisfy the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. I found that leadership constituted a unique factor in work adjustment because dissatisfaction with the management pushed many of my participants to quit their jobs rather than attempt adjustment. I explained this finding with Herzberg's (1968) two-factor theory of motivation. I also considered my informants' work adjustment through van Manen's (1990,

2014) five existentials of spatiality, temporality, relationality, corporeality, and materiality. I formulated several implications for policy and practice and described the theoretical and empirical implications of my findings. Lastly, I articulated the limitations and delimitations of my study and provided recommendations for future research.

The key takeaway from my study is that the work adjustment of expatriate teachers in Chinese internationalized schools is complex, but usually follows one of two paths. Individuals either change their work environment or change themselves to restore job satisfaction. Flexibility in work adjustment varied as different participants showed different tolerance for discomfort before attempting a change. Notably, perseverance in adjustment attempts was very low for dissatisfaction with school leadership. It could be concluded that management style is a crucial factor for expatriate teachers, and dissatisfaction with it prevents adjustment attempts.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 15, 2023

Adrian Golis
Laura Jones

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1705 The work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools: A hermeneutical phenomenology

Dear Adrian Golis, Laura Jones,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Educator,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be expatriates residing in the People's Republic of China, 18 years of age or older, who are currently employed in a Chinese internationalized school, have worked in a Chinese internationalized school for at least one school year, and have experienced the phenomenon of work adjustment. Participants will be asked to take part in a one-on-one, audio- and video-recorded, online or in-person interview, review the interview transcript, write a reflective letter about their personal experiences of work adjustment, take part in an audio- and video-recorded, online focus group, and reflect on a summary of the study's emergent findings. It should take approximately three to four hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and locations.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

Click [here](#) or visit [REDACTED] to access the consent document. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document electronically before the interview.

Sincerely,

Adrian Marcin Golis
Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: The work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools: A hermeneutical phenomenology.

Principal Investigator: Adrian Marcin Golis, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an expatriate residing in the People's Republic of China, 18 years of age or older, who is currently employed in a Chinese internationalized school, has worked in a Chinese internationalized school for at least one school year, and has experienced the phenomenon of work adjustment. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand the work adjustment of expatriate teachers employed in Chinese internationalized schools.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a one-on-one interview intended to gather information about your experiences of work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools. The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. It will be conducted either through Microsoft Teams or in person and will be audio- and video-recorded.
2. Review the transcript of your interview. It should take approximately 30 minutes.
3. Write a reflective letter about your personal experiences of work adjustment. It should take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.
4. Participate in a focus group intended to discuss and compare experiences of work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools with other expatriate teachers. The focus group will take approximately 60 minutes. It will be conducted through Microsoft Teams and will be audio- and video-recorded.
5. Reflect on my written summary of the study's preliminary findings. This might include giving your critical feedback, correcting any misconceptions, or adding your ideas and observations. This task should take approximately 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, you may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your experiences of work adjustment and from an exchange with other expatriate teachers.

Benefits to society include the study's potential to impact the recruitment, management, and retention of expatriate teachers in Chinese internationalized schools and advance the existing knowledge on expatriate teachers and international education.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation or in private Microsoft Teams sessions. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Adrian Marcin Golis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Laura E. Jones, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Date

Signature

Appendix D

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself as if we just met for the first time.
2. What did you do for a living before coming to China?
3. Tell me your reasons for coming to China and why you decided to work here as a teacher.
4. How do you feel about living and working in China?
5. Try to remember your first days at your current job. What shocked or surprised you about your school and its environment?
6. What aspects of your job satisfy you the most?
7. What aspects of your job dissatisfy you the most?
8. Think of a turning point in your work when you decided something must change. What was the thing you needed to change?
9. How long did you wait until you decided to start this change?
10. Think of some more situations when you decided to change something significant in your work environment. How did you attempt the change?
11. Please give me some more examples of changes you made to your work environment. Think of the people you work with, the physical space, or your teaching.
12. Please give me an example of something you *would like to change* in your work environment but you think it is impossible.
13. Share some situations when you decided to change something significant about *yourself* to match the requirements of your work.
14. Please give me some more examples of changes you made to *yourself*. Think of the people you work with, the physical space, or your teaching.
15. Please give me an example of something your school would like to change about you but you cannot or will not change. Why is it an impossible change for you?
16. What motivates you to persevere in your job?
17. Think of a situation that would push you to quit your job. What expectations or requirements would be too much to accept?
18. What other experiences of work adjustment can you share?

Appendix E

Protocol Writing Prompt

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give your younger self in the first days of a new job at a Chinese internationalized school? What would you propose to do differently? What mistakes would you want to avoid? Write a letter to your younger self listing a few pieces of crucial advice. As you give your advice, try to think of specific events and situations that you have experienced or that your younger self may experience. Make sure your letter is at least two paragraphs long.

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell us where you work, what you teach, and what is special or interesting about your job.
2. What drove you to become a teacher in China?
3. What spontaneously comes to mind when you think of work adjustment in your school?
4. How well do you think you adjusted to your current job?
5. What drives you to stay in your school rather than change to another job?
6. If you could give one piece of advice to your employers and supervisors, what would it be?
7. What other thoughts do you have about work adjustment in Chinese internationalized schools?

Appendix G

Code Counts for Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Code count
Discovering what lies behind the façade	It is all about the money	287
	The price of a high salary	402
Trying to be a real teacher	Struggling with the imposed role	305
	Adjusting to teaching in Chinese internationalized schools	406
Navigating relationships with the paying customers	Relationships with students	206
	Struggling with classroom management	200
	Relationships with the parents	95
Trying to function in a multicultural work environment	Relationships with the management	375
	Relationships with other teachers	196
	Being part of a diverse workplace	256
Total		2728

Appendix H

Sample Code List: Stefan's Individual Interview

accepting diversity	attitudes to change
against one's convictions	learning Mandarin/Mandarin proficiency
balancing the pros and cons	LT turnover
teacher back home	no real teaching
being silenced	no opportunities back home
asking for materials	not blaming the students
relationships with LTs	incentives for students
commitment to profit, not education	offering solutions
comparing to other schools	feedback for parents
demanding respect	overwhelmed with density/noise
determined to make things work	parents have power
difficult students/special needs	participant background
comparing with other ETs	personal regrets
disorganized leadership	potential reasons to quit
ET as decoration	rat race
ET turnover	realizing cultural differences
ETs not real teachers	resentment toward students
getting more sensitive about students	rural school location
getting tougher	school facilities
good workplace atmosphere	strict discipline/rewards-punishments
hard to shock me	students' English level
high turnover	talking about change
I haven't changed anything	teachers' office
impact of COVID	teaching style LTs vs. ETs
incompetent leadership	team spirit
time use in meetings	the same problems everywhere
information sharing	toxic environment
job switching instead of adjustment	trying to be a real teacher
language barrier	trying to change communication
leadership afraid of parents and students	trying to understand leadership
leadership afraid of teacher complaints	turning unmotivated students around
leadership takes parents' side	unreasonable parental expectations
leadership only wants positives	

Appendix I

Sample Code List: Sub-Theme “Relationships with the Management”

Category	Code	Code count
Expatriate teachers’ perceptions of the management	features of Chinese-style leadership	23
	unstable leadership	19
	workplace hierarchy	10
	leadership change	7
	anger at school leadership	7
	expat leadership has no power	6
	nepotism/guangxi	4
Indirect contact	telling, not discussing	13
	negotiating with leadership	11
	confrontation with leadership	10
	trying to understand leadership	10
	no feedback from leadership	9
	being silenced	9
	talking to leadership about change	8
	offering solutions	8
	dangers of being direct	7
	leadership expects only positive feedback	6
	leadership afraid of teacher complaints	6
	conflict with leadership	4
	no direct criticism	3
Negative experiences with the management	no support/care from school	24
	unfair/unequal treatment	22
	racism	20
	incompetent leadership	14
	lack of recognition	13
	dissatisfaction with Chinese-style leadership	9
	disorganized leadership	8
	disrespectful leadership	8
	feeling unwanted/unwelcome	8
	treatment of native vs. non-native speakers	6
	being micromanaged	6
	no loyalty from leadership to long-term employees	6
	spiteful leadership	6
	leadership doesn’t support teacher growth	5
	arbitration by school leadership	4
	being reprimanded	3
	Positive experiences with the management	being valued/trusted by leadership
support from expat coordinator		10
gifts from the school		3
fair treatment by the school		2
Sub-theme total		375

Appendix J

Sample Memos

Preview Comment

Memo: Edited 2023-06-24 09:16 by Adrian Golis
after checking Martha's transcript



Reading between the lines

I first thought there was very little about adjustment in Martha's interview. But when reading her interview transcript, I noticed I was wrong. There are a few clear adjustment motives in her account. First of all, cries for recognition, demanding to be noticed and acknowledged, refusing the white monkey status. It is a big thing to be a highly qualified (overqualified!) teacher yet being treated like "decoration," to quote Martha. Martha rejects her role at the school and much of her adjustment consists of attempts to change the school environment, to make people see her as a real teacher and treat her and her work seriously. I think her interview is very significant in that it reveals the precarious status of ETs, and the inner conflict to accept this degrading role. Martha is opinionated and sometimes even bitter, but she is also uncompromising, she won't give up on her ideals, she remains true to the values she believes in. I'm very impressed with her resolve.

Preview Comment

Memo: Edited 2023-07-01 15:05 by Adrian Golis
20230701



Nobody gets it right the first time

I noticed that better familiarity with the transcripts makes coding much faster. Lesson learned. After getting each transcript checked and ironed out, I will read it three, four more times before even thinking about coding it. I'll also immediately write down some codes that spontaneously come to my mind during re-reading. I need to redo all my coding up to this point because I feel I can do it better now. I guess Saldana was correct that nobody gets it right the first time.

Preview Comment

Memo: Edited 2023-07-17 09:16 by Adrian Golis
after coding Thomas's protocol



Not what I expected

Thomas's reflective letter is almost entirely about the linguistic side of work adjustment. He seems to focus on language only and he is making some valid points. I can understand why it is important to him, as a linguistics major, but I am missing some other things. In all, Thomas's data seems incomplete, like some aspects that should have been mentioned did not appear at all. But that is the curse of semi-structured interviews, I cannot lead the participants to talk about the aspects I find important. What turns out important to them can be surprising.

Preview Comment

Memo: Edited 2023-08-02 12:03 by Adrian Golis
after coding Oliver's interview



Always evolving

Like many other participants, Oliver mentioned management change as a potential reason for quitting. Actually, not potential because he actually quit his previous job because of a new manager (like Anna and Sara). Management is really an important theme.

Oliver mentioned that he is tougher now and many things that would have put him off in the past have no effect on him now. I heard similar things from Michael, Anna, and Sara. So I guess that's really adjustment, you learn to accept some bad things will always happen and you need to learn to live with them. But not all participants feel that way. Martha has been in China for 8 years, changes jobs almost every year, and still struggles to accept her role as an ET. Maybe it's because she's a little older than the other participants and very grounded in her beliefs and self-worth?