



Equal Opportunities International

The expatriation experience of the Chinese spouse in New Zealand
Christopher Selvarajah Stanley Petzall

Article information:

To cite this document:

Christopher Selvarajah Stanley Petzall, (2003), "The expatriation experience of the Chinese spouse in New Zealand", Equal Opportunities International, Vol. 22 Iss 5 pp. 31 - 49

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610150310787487>

Downloaded on: 06 March 2016, At: 19:46 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 0 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 167 times since 2006*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

Kimmo Riusala, Vesa Suutari, (2000), "Expatriation and careers: perspectives of expatriates and spouses", Career Development International, Vol. 5 Iss 2 pp. 81-90 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/13620430010318945>

Arno Haslberger, Chris Brewster, (2008), "The expatriate family: an international perspective", Journal of Managerial Psychology, Vol. 23 Iss 3 pp. 324-346 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02683940810861400>

Julia Richardson, (2006), "Self-directed expatriation: family matters", Personnel Review, Vol. 35 Iss 4 pp. 469-486 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00483480610670616>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:215423 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

The Expatriation
Experience of the
Chinese Spouse
in New Zealand

by *Christopher Selvarajah*, School of Management, RMIT University, Melbourne 3000, Australia; and *Stanley Petzall*, Deakin Business School, Faculty of Business and Law, Deakin University

Abstract

This study examines the adjustment process and the adaptability of the Chinese migrant spouses' in Auckland, New Zealand. A total of 97 spouses participated in a survey from a random sample of 200. The results suggest that both anticipatory and in-country experiences are relevant to adjustment. The results of the study, specifically suggest that the adjustment process experienced by the Chinese spouses in the New Zealand environment is based on a number of factors such as (1) the amount of information and knowledge of New Zealand they have prior to arrival in New Zealand, (2) the backgrounds of the spouses, (3) their experiences prior to and on arrival in New Zealand, and (4) their ability to cope in the new environment.

Immigration is a significant force in the shaping of New Zealand economy and society. Though Chinese migration to New Zealand can be traced back to more than one hundred years the number of early Chinese settlers was relatively small. In the last 10 years, aided by changes in immigration policy, Chinese seeking settlement in New Zealand has increased from 2431 in 1992 to 4088 in 1998 (*Statistics New Zealand*, 1998). The 1996 New Zealand Census reported that there were 82,320 Chinese in New Zealand (*Statistics New Zealand*, 1997). In order to bring immigration in line with the economic restructuring that began in 1984, a new points system was introduced in 1991. The move to a points system tended to favour people in their early-to-middle working ages with appropriate qualifications, work experience and proven business skills. All applicants who achieved the required number of points (28 in 1991, increasing to 31 by 1995) automatically qualified for entry. Many Chinese from Mainland China met these requirements and the number of approvals for these people increased markedly. In this specific age group, most of the new arrivals are married and come with their families (wives and children). The number of new arrivals was high, particularly in Auckland where many choose to settle.

In the New Zealand culture, which is basically of an Anglo-Saxon origin with a strong South Pacific Maori presence, the new migrants and their families who have different backgrounds, will undoubtedly experience cultural adjustment problems when settling in to the new environment (Selvarajah,

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

1998). In the 1998 study, Selvarajah looked at the settling-in process of three Chinese ethnic groups from China, Taiwan and Singapore/Malaysia. In that study the results indicated that the environment from which they originated had an influence on the adjustment patterns in New Zealand. He also suggested that previous overseas experiences in a multicultural environment and the ability to communicate had profound impact on their relative ability to adjust in the new environment. This study will look at the expatriation process of the Chinese spouse from China. The home country in this study is China and the host country is New Zealand.

The Theory of Cross-cultural Adjustment

Generally, cross-cultural adjustment is conceptualised as the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country (Black, 1988; Oberg, 1960; Nicholson, 1984). In the past, researchers such as Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962), Oberg (1960), and Torbiorn (1982) have viewed cross-cultural adjustment as a unidimensional phenomenon. In recent years, however, researchers have looked at cross-cultural adjustment as a multifaceted phenomenon where the expatriate and spouse adjust to work, the host environment and interact with host nationals (Black and Stephens, 1989).

Much of the theoretical foundation for cross-cultural adjustment research is based on Oberg's (1960) work on culture shock. Later, scholars such as Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962) and Torbiorn (1982) also added important contributions. Essentially, these scholars suggest that when people first enter a new culture, they are not sure what behaviour is acceptable. Over time, they discover that many behaviours which were acceptable in their home country are not acceptable in the host country and vice versa. Consequently, many symptoms of culture shock are in part a function of the stress induced by the behavioural expectations, differences and the accompanying uncertainty with which the individual must cope. Thus, the basic cross-cultural adjustment process is the reduction of uncertainty by learning which behaviours are appropriate in the new culture and which ones are not. Therefore, factors that tend to reduce the uncertainty of what to do and when to do it or what not to do and when not to do it in the host country culture generally facilitate adjustment (Brett, 1980; Black, 1988; Church 1982). On the other hand factors that increase uncertainty tend to inhibit adjustment.

The Influence of the Spouse and Family on Expatriate Adjustment

When a family leaves its home and settles into a new area, the expatriate is usually the center of attention. The problems of other family members may be neglected in the excitement of moving to another country, and unsolved problems may appear in more severe form at a later date. These problems can become serious enough to threaten the successful adjustment of the expatriate. A frequent reason for the premature termination of the cross-cultural assignment, for instance, is the inadequate adjustment of the spouse (Parasuraman et al 1989, McCoy, 1985). Children's lack of success at

school, or failures in developing new friendships can also cause difficulties for the entire family.

Scholars, such as Harvey (1985), Parasuraman et al (1989), Selvarajah, (2000), Thompson (1986), Torbiorn (1982), and Tung (1988, 1981), have argued that the adjustment of the expatriate spouse is an important factor in the success or failure of the expatriate in overseas assignments. When spouse and family have positive experiences, such as job satisfaction or good relationship with work colleagues, these will be positive factors contributing to the expatriate adjustment in the new host environment. However, if spouse and family have negative experiences, such as communication problems due to language differences, coping difficulties in the local culture, and difficulties in gaining appropriate employment, these negative factors may influence the expatriate's adjustment in the new environment. Therefore, in understanding the adaptation of the expatriate, analysis of the expatriate family experiences should not be ignored. As Thompson (1986) indicated, the spouse of an expatriate can play a key role in the success or failure of the expatriate.

**The Expatriation
Experience of the
Chinese Spouse
in New Zealand**

Anticipatory Adjustment

Building on the logic of uncertainty reduction, theorists, such as Black and Mendenhall (1990), Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991), Church (1982), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1962), Oberg (1960), and Torbiorn (1982) have argued that before actually entering a new culture individuals can make anticipatory adjustments to the foreign culture that can significantly affect their adjustment once they arrive in the host country. For expatriate spouses in particular, there are several anticipatory variables, which can potentially facilitate cross-culture adjustment.

One such uncertainty reduction mechanism for facilitating cross-cultural adjustment is previous experience in another foreign environment (Nicholson, 1984; Torbiorn, 1982). Previous international experience can help individuals know generally what to expect relative to transferring and adjusting to a new culture. Thus, as spouses extrapolate principles from past international adjustment experiences, they can utilise this information to reduce uncertainty in the upcoming transition (Ruben and Kealey, 1979).

Although individuals can make anticipatory adjustments that reduce some degree of the uncertainty associated with entering a foreign culture (Black & Mendenhall 1990), research would suggest that an individual's motivation to make the cross-cultural adjustment is a critical anticipatory variable (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1962; Oberg, 1960; Torbiorn, 1982). This is because in general, the greater the individual's motivation to make the transition to the new culture, the greater will be the subsequent efforts to adjust to the culture. As such, one would expect that the favourableness of the spouse's opinion about accepting the overseas assignment would be positively related with the spouse's cross-cultural adjustment.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Perhaps the most widely discussed resource that would help reduce uncertainty associated with cross-cultural adjustment is pre-departure training (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Earley, 1987; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Torbiorn, 1982). Because pre-departure training can provide the individual with information about the general culture as well as information on how to interact with people of that culture, it can reduce the uncertainty associated with a new environment (Black and Mendenhall, 1990, Tung, 1981). Therefore information gathering and availability of information are seen to be important factors in reducing uncertainty and ease of adjustment in expatriation.

In-Country Adjustment

Once an individual has arrived in a foreign culture, there is usually a short “honeymoon” phase before the “adjustment” phase (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1962; Harris and Moran, 1991; Selvarajah, 1998; 2000; Torbiorn, 1982;). The honeymoon phase usually occurs within the first few weeks to two months after arrival and is characterised by fascination with all the “new” and “interesting” aspects of the culture (Adler, 1986). This fascination occurs because the individual has not yet had to cope seriously with demands of day-to-day life in the new culture. However, once the individual is past the honeymoon phase, then there is usually a decline in morale, after which the individual gradually, over time and to some extent through trial and error, learns what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. This learning usually results in adjustment to the new culture.

Another potentially important, in-country factor relevant to spouse adjustment is social support from host country nationals (HCNs). While expatriates have, in a sense, a built-in social network with HCNs at work, spouses usually have a much more difficult time developing a social network with HCNs and are quite often socially isolated (Harvey 1985). Thus, social support from HCNs may be particularly important to spouse adjustment for several reasons: (1) HCNs understand the host culture, (2) HCNs can provide information on and explanations of the host culture; (3) HCNs can provide feedback on the appropriateness of behaviours, and (4) this type of information and cues can collectively serve to reduce uncertainty regarding the general culture and facilitate spouse adjustment. Therefore, to the extent that spouses have social networks with HCNs, one would expect them to be better adjusted.

In addition to social support from HCNs, social support from people of a similar culture can be an important source of reducing the uncertainty associated with the new host culture and identifying ways of acculturating to the host culture.

Living conditions are also a potentially important determinant of spouse’s cross-cultural adjustment. Because most spouses do not work dur-

ing the period of the expatriate's overseas assignment, they tend to spend a significant amount of time engaged in activities either in the home or in activities that have relevance to the home (Harvey, 1985). This is also true for immigrant spouses who either do not work or find difficulty getting employment. Accordingly, the living conditions with which spouses must contend would seem to be an important adjustment antecedent. For example, different and inadequate living conditions would likely create significant uncertainty concerning a variety of issues such as food, transport, medical, and children's schooling. This uncertainty would in turn be expected to have a negative effect on adjustment.

Another significant in-country variable that could affect the level of uncertainty encountered in an international assignment is cultural novelty (Black, 1988; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Oberg, 1960; Torbion, 1982). Essentially, the more novel and different the host culture is compared to the home culture, the more uncertainty one would expect about the appropriateness of behaviours.

Since immigrants go through a similar process of cross-cultural adjustment as expatriates (Kim, 1977, 1988; Kim and Gudykunst, 1987) and based on the above literature, the following hypotheses on the experiences, adjustment and adaptation of the spouses of new Chinese settlers to the New Zealand environment are put forward for testing:

- H1. There is a positive correlation between employability of expatriate spouses in New Zealand and their happiness in New Zealand
- H2. The expatriate spouses who have previous overseas experience prior to coming to New Zealand tend to cope better in the New Zealand culture than those who do not have such experience.
- H3. The expatriate spouse who has prior overseas experience is more supportive of socialising with New Zealanders than those who do not have the experience.
- H4. The more positive adjustments the expatriate spouse makes, the greater is the support for staying in New Zealand.
- H5. The more positive adjustments the expatriate spouse makes, the greater is the perceived comfort of their lives in New Zealand.
- H6. The more information the expatriate spouse had about New Zealand prior to expatriation the better the adjustment in New Zealand.
- H7. The greater the possibility of adaptability of the expatriate spouses, the better the overall experience in New Zealand.
- H8. The expatriate spouse who has prior overseas experience tends to have higher adaptability.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Research Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 200 new Chinese immigrant spouses selected randomly from the Peoples Republic of China who had settled in Auckland between 1994 and 1998 (The research was conducted in September 1999). The term “new” categorises the expatriate spouses who have been in New Zealand for no longer than 5 years. The sample was made up from lists collected from associations and church memberships. The respondents were contacted by telephone to ascertain their period of stay in New Zealand and for their approval to participate. Based on these two selection criteria, questionnaires were posted to them with self-addressed stamped envelopes. The back-translated questionnaire in Mandarin was piloted tested prior to posting. The questionnaire comprised 30 questions divided into six major areas: (1) general information about the spouses, (2) background of the spouses, (3) life in China, (4) life in New Zealand, (5) adjustment factors, (6) adaptability factors, and (7) important factors causing problems in New Zealand. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire, explaining its purpose and origin, providing contact details and assurance of confidentiality.

Respondents were required to enter answers to ordinal questions on a scale of 1 to 5 anchored at each end by words such as “very little”, “very unhappy” and “very severe” or “very much”, “very happy” and “not severe at all” depending on the question asked. Respondents were also asked to answer some nominal questions labelled by words such as “yes” or “no”. The questions related to the spouses’ perceptions on aspects such as experience, adjustment, and adaptation.

After appropriate follow up, 113 questionnaires were returned, of which 97 were useable, yielding a response rate of 48.5 per cent.

Cross-tabulation and ANOVA was used to cross-test relationships between variables.

Findings

Table 1 illustrates the demographic and profile of the spouse in this survey (N=97). In this study all expatriate spouses were women.

Most expatriate spouses are aged between 26-35 and accounted for 69 per cent of the total sample. The reason for the concentration in the 26 to 35 age group was that because respondents in the younger age group who applied to immigrate gained extra points under the new immigration points system. 65 per cent of the sample had lived in New Zealand between two to four years. Of the total sample, only 25 per cent of the respondents were currently employed in New Zealand, which contrasts with their employment status in China where 74 per cent were gainfully employed. This employment inequity experienced in New Zealand translates into a majority, 62 per cent, seeking to be re-skilled by gaining a New Zealand education. 23 per

| Table 1. Demographic and Profile of the respondents | | | | | |
|---|----|-----------------------|----|-------------------------------|----|
| Age | % | Time in NZ (in years) | % | Employment in NZ | % |
| <25 | 5 | 1 | 13 | Yes | 25 |
| 26-35 | 69 | 1-2 | 15 | No | 75 |
| 36-45 | 20 | 2-3 | 34 | | |
| >45 | 6 | 3-4 | 31 | | |
| | | 4-5 | 7 | | |
| Occupation in NZ | % | Employment in China | % | Overseas experience of spouse | % |
| Housewife | 23 | Yes | 97 | Yes | 74 |
| Self-employed | 1 | No | 3 | No | 26 |
| Studying | 62 | | | | |
| Job hunting | 11 | | | | |
| Other | 3 | | | | |

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

cent were housewives. 74 per cent of the respondents have not lived in any other country, other than in China, prior to coming to New Zealand.

In the following section, the 'expatriation journey' of the spouses from China will be explained in terms of their perception of their experiences, adjustments and adaptations both in the home and host countries. In this regard their perceptions prior to leaving China, their experiences in New Zealand and their adjustments and adaptation in New Zealand will be discussed.

Prior to departure from China

In general, prior to departure to New Zealand, the expatriate spouses were quite happy with their lives in China. 82 per cent were of the opinion that their family life ($X=4.19$) was satisfactory, 73 per cent felt that their husband's were satisfied with their career ($X=4.02$), 68 per cent indicated that they had job satisfaction in China ($X=3.83$). See table 2.

| Table 2 Dimensions of the expatriate spouses' life in China N=97 | | |
|--|------|------|
| Dimensions | X | s |
| Happiness of family life | 4.19 | 0.88 |
| Satisfaction with husband's career | 4.02 | 1.15 |
| Satisfaction with job | 3.83 | 1.06 |

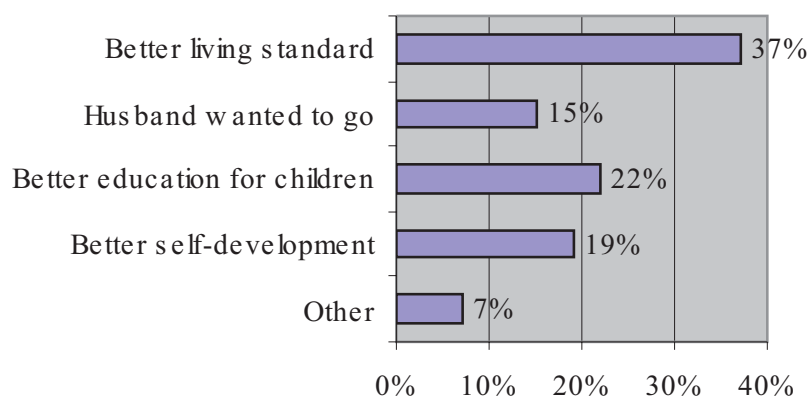
Push-Pull Factors

Even though their life in China was satisfactory, the respondents indicated, as illustrated in figure 1, that they had supported expatriation to New Zealand

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

for a number of reasons. The majority (37 %) felt that the standard of living in New Zealand was better in comparison to China. They also believed that their children would have a better opportunity at getting good education (22 %). 19 per cent felt that they too would have a better opportunity for developing their careers in New Zealand. Their responses suggest that they had given careful consideration to factors other than just supporting their husband's desires for expatriation .

Figure 1. The most important attraction for the spouse to come to New Zealand



Preparing to depart

Most of the respondents were excited about coming to New Zealand (70 per cent). Some of the respondents expressed the view that for most people from Mainland China the ability to immigrate is a great opportunity open to only a few people.

Only a very small percentage of the respondents (14 per cent) had sufficient information provided to them before coming to New Zealand. 53 per cent stated that they had very little knowledge of New Zealand prior to arrival.

Experiences in New Zealand

The expatriate spouse's response to the family life in New Zealand in comparison to that in China is illustrated in table 3. The respondents were highly optimistic about the children's education ($X=3.43$) and were of the opinion that their overall experience in New Zealand had a positive impact on the family life ($X=3.41$). This optimism however was not reflected in their perception about their husband's job prospects in New Zealand ($X=2.94$) and their social life is worse in comparison to that in China ($X=2.08$). They indicated a high level of stress in New Zealand ($X=1.46$) in comparison to the surroundings of their familiar home country.

| Dimensions | % | X | s |
|--------------------------------|----|------|-------|
| Children's education | 55 | 3.43 | 1.301 |
| Positive impact on family life | 48 | 3.41 | 1.380 |
| Husband's poor job prospects | 38 | 2.94 | 1.367 |
| Poor Social life | 72 | 2.08 | 1.083 |
| Stress | 56 | 1.46 | 1.287 |

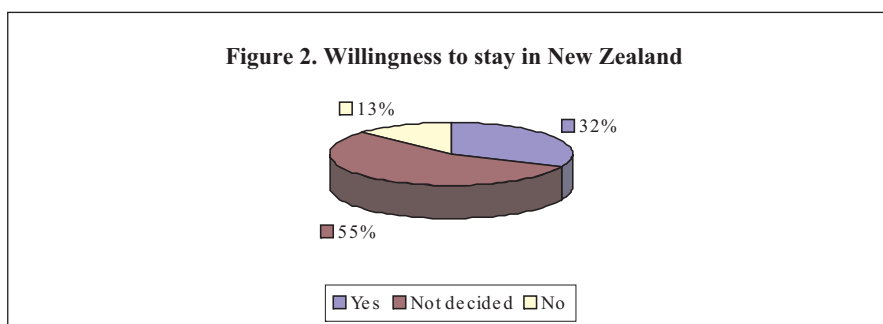
The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Adaptation

The expatriate spouses' perception to adjustment to the New Zealand environment were measured by the degree of satisfaction as experienced by the respondents, whether their expectations had been met, whether they were planning to stay in New Zealand permanently and, whether they would have come if they had fully understood the local conditions prior to coming to New Zealand. The mean and standard deviation of these three factors are shown in table 4. On average, though their experience did not satisfy their expectations and they were not happy with their experience, most respondents would have still come to New Zealand under the current prevailing conditions.

| Factors | X | s |
|--|-------|-----|
| NZ experience met expectation | 2.383 | 1.1 |
| Satisfaction in the NZ experience | 2.947 | 1.0 |
| Willingness to expatriate to NZ if aware of conditions in NZ | 3.500 | 2.2 |

However, figure 2 suggests that 55 per cent were not certain about making New Zealand their permanent home. 13 per cent had decided to leave New Zealand and the remaining 32 per cent had decided to make New Zealand their home.



The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Adaptability Factors

The three variables that measure adaptability in the new environment are 1) Maintaining close ties with people of Chinese culture 2) The frequency with which they socialised with New Zealanders, and 3) Coping with the New Zealand culture. Table 5 highlights that the respondents (76 %) view close ties with people of Chinese culture as a way of adapting to the new environment ($X=4.1$). Only 19 per cent socialised with New Zealanders ($X=2.6$) and this probably accounts for the perceived inability to cope with the New Zealand culture.

| Factors | X | s |
|---|-------|------|
| Maintaining close ties with people of Chinese culture | 4.147 | 0.88 |
| Frequency of socializing with New Zealanders | 2.553 | 1.00 |
| Coping with New Zealand culture | 2.653 | 0.95 |

Factors causing the greatest problems in New Zealand

The respondents selected 5 out of 15 factors relating to adjustment in New Zealand as causing the greatest problems in adjusting to New Zealand. In order of severity these were: Work opportunities, Language, Cost of living, Relationship with New Zealanders and local culture. These 5 factors with mean over 3.5 are highlighted in table 6.

| Factors | X | s |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Work opportunities</i> | 4.701 | 0.562 |
| <i>Language</i> | 4.536 | 0.723 |
| <i>Cost of living</i> | 3.845 | 0.858 |
| <i>Relationship with local</i> | 3.732 | 1.026 |
| <i>Local culture</i> | 3.567 | 0.999 |
| Children's education | 3.546 | 0.913 |
| Accommodation | 3.320 | 1.016 |
| Hospital | 2.804 | 0.975 |
| Relationship with other family members | 2.711 | 0.935 |
| Transportation | 2.340 | 0.923 |
| Climate | 2.330 | 0.732 |

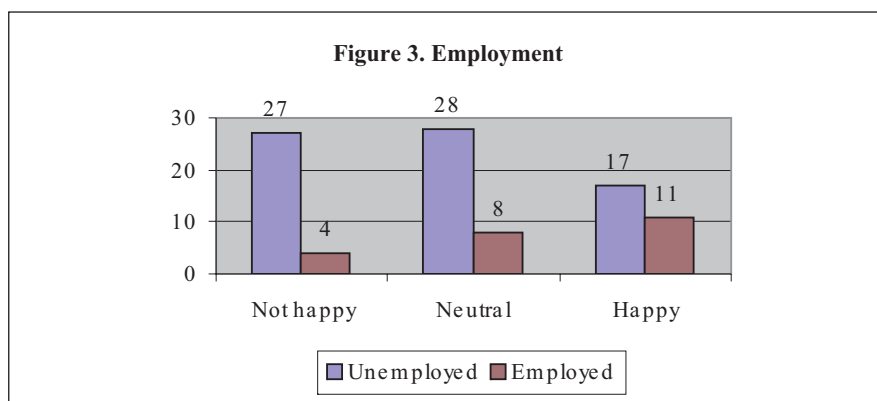
| | | |
|------------------------|-------|-------|
| Food | 2.289 | 1.000 |
| Religion | 2.278 | 1.087 |
| Goods and equipment | 2.247 | 0.936 |
| Government Bureaucracy | 2.247 | 1.000 |

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

94 per cent of the sample population responded that lack of work opportunities in New Zealand caused the greatest adjustment problems. This was followed by communication difficulties, which were highlighted by 89 per cent of the spouses. 65 per cent of the sample responded that the cost-of-living in New Zealand was another factor that created adjustment difficulties. The relationship with local New Zealanders and understanding the culture were also seen to be causing adjustment difficulties, (65 per cent and 48 per cent respectively).

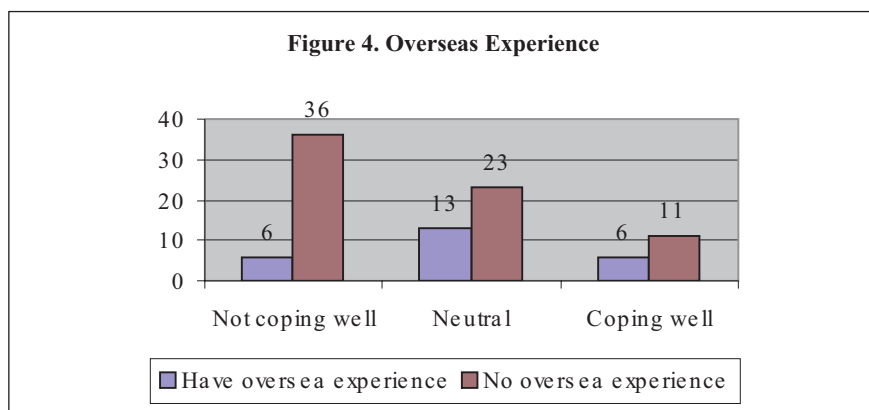
Tests of associations between nominal and ordinal variables

As the sample population was small and to increase reliability, Question 16 (the expatriate spouses' experience in New Zealand) was re-coded from 5 categories to 3 categories (not happy, neutral and happy). A significant relationship was found between "employment status" and "experience in New Zealand" ($\chi^2=5.706$, $df=2$, $p=0.053$). As illustrated in figure 3, the spouses who were employed tended to be satisfied with their New Zealand experience compared to those who were not employed. 39 per cent of the employed spouses are satisfied with their New Zealand experience while only 13 per cent of unemployed spouses were satisfied.



Using the same method, a significant relationship was found between "Overseas experience" and "Coping with the New Zealand culture" ($\chi^2=5.48$, $df=2$, $p=0.065$). The spouses who had previous overseas experience, prior to coming to New Zealand, tend to be coping well with the New Zealand culture compared to those who have no previous overseas experience. See figure 4.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand



The Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to study the relationship between the nominal factors (spouses with overseas experience prior to immigration and those who did not have overseas experience) and the ordinal variables, (Socialising with New Zealanders and Excitement about immigrating to New Zealand)(see table 7). The test provided significant support for spouses with prior overseas experience being less excited about immigration, suggesting that the new experience is less of a novelty compared to those who had not been abroad prior to the current sojourn. (($p=0.054$). However, the spouses who had prior overseas experience were more supportive of socialising with New Zealanders ($p=0.020$). This suggests that spouses' prior overseas experience provides a greater ease of adjustment to a new environment.

| Variables | Overseas Experience (Mean) | | P-Value |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|---------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Excitement about immigrating to NZ | 2.879 | 4.102 | 0.054 |
| Socializing with New Zealanders | 3.125 | 1.978 | 0.020 |

ANOVA

In the following section, adjustment and adaptability to the New Zealand environment are tested with the Willingness of the spouse to remain in New Zealand. To cross-test this relationship, using ANOVA, two meaningful indices, 'Adjustment' and 'Adaptability' were composed as interval variables from the sum of selected ordinal variables. Then tests were conducted to explore the relationship between these indices and the nominal or ordinal variables by using the meaningful indices as independent variables, while using nominal or ordinal variables as the dependent variables.

Adjustment

The Adjustment index was composed of the variables: NZ experience met expectation (Q14), Happiness in the New Zealand experience (Q16) and Willingness to come to NZ if aware of local conditions (Q26).

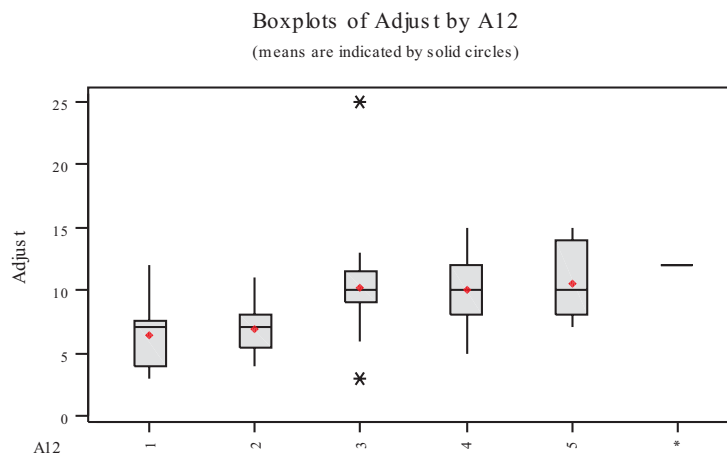
A significant relationship was found between Adjustment and Willingness to stay in New Zealand ($df=2$, $p=0.012$). The result suggests that the better the adjustment the spouse makes the more support there is for staying in New Zealand (see figure 5). A significant relationship was also found between Adjustment and the Perceived Comfort of life in New Zealand ($df=4$, $p=0.000$). This result implies that the better the adjustment the spouse makes the greater is the perceived comfort of life in New Zealand (see figure 6). In this study, the ANOVA assumptions are supported by residual analysis.

The results also showed that the more information the spouses had about New Zealand prior to the expatriation the better the adjustment they made ($df=2$, $p=0.009$). (See figure 7). To increase reliability, Q10 (Information known about New Zealand) was re-coded from five to three categories (little, neutral and a lot). A significant relationship was found between adjustment and the information known.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Figure 5. Significant relationship between Adjustment and Willingness to stay in New Zealand

Note: 1= Yes (stay permanently), 2=Not decided, 3= No (stay permanently)
(ANOVA, $DF=2$, $P\text{-Value}=0.012$)



The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Figure 6. Significant relationship between Adjustment and Comfort of life in New Zealand

Note: 1-5 is the scale of the degree on comfort from less to much more.
(ANOVA, DF=4, P-Value=0.000)

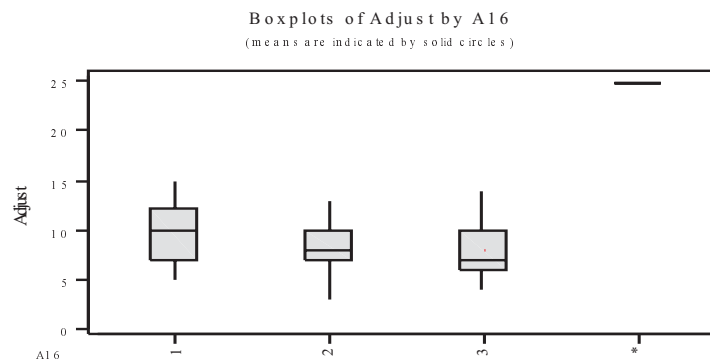
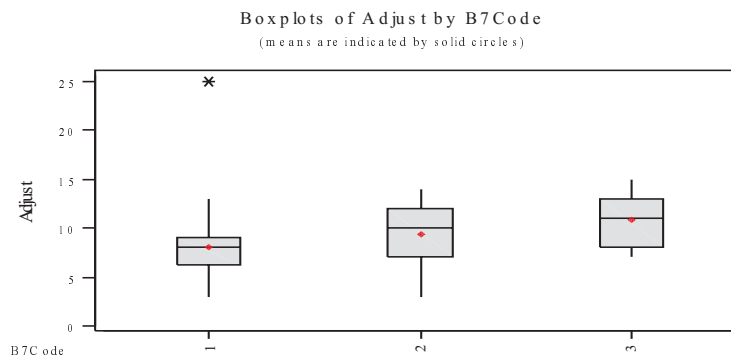


Figure 7. Significant relationship between Adjustment and Information Known

Note: 1= little, 2=neutral, 3= a lot
(ANOVA, DF=2, P-Value=0.009)



Adaptability

The Adaptability index was composed of the following variables: Close ties with Chinese culture (Q17) + Socialising with New Zealanders (Q18) + Coping with New Zealand culture (Q19). A significant relationship was found between adaptability and the spouses' experience in New Zealand. Figure 8 suggests that the greater the adaptability possibility the spouses have the happier is the overall experience they seem to have in New Zealand

(df=4, p=0.014). In figure 9, a strong but not significant relationship was found between adaptability in New Zealand and previous overseas experience. The results indicate that spouses with overseas experience tend to adapt better.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Figure 8. Significant relationship between “Adaptability” and “New Zealand Experience”

Note: The scale 1-5 is the degree of feeling about New Zealand experience from unhappy to happy

(ANOVA, DF=4, P-Value=0.014)

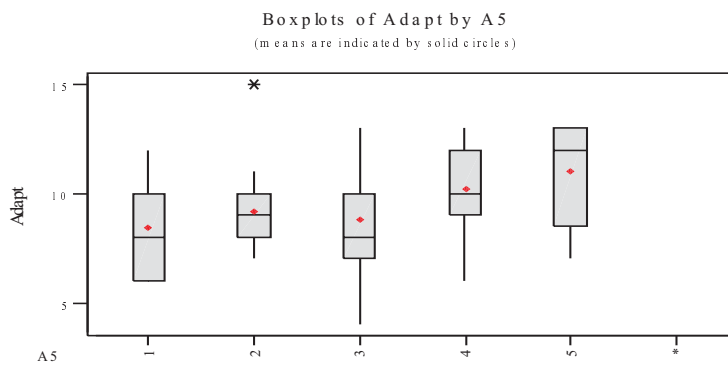
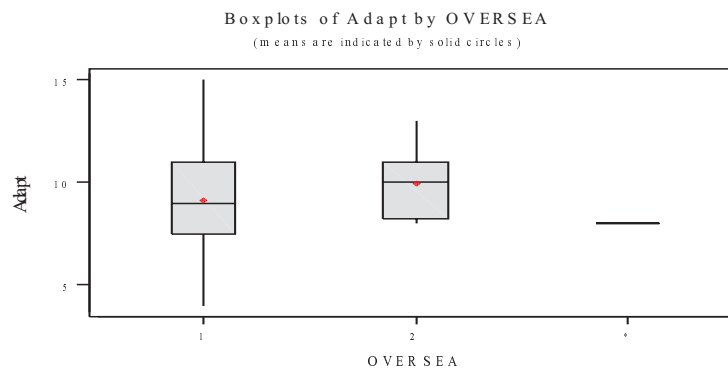


Figure 9. Strong relationship between “Adaptability” and “Overseas experience”

Note: 1=No, 2=Yes (t-test, DF=91, P-Value=0.068)



The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

Discussion

This study was an attempt to collect data directly from the spouses of new Chinese immigrants in Auckland and explore empirically a variety of antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment. The results suggest that both anticipatory and in-country variables are relevant to each facet of adjustment. Although the cross-sectional design of the study limits the causal inferences that can be drawn, the results do point to an interesting adjustment process that future studies might examine more extensively.

The results of the study suggest that the adjustment process experienced by the expatriate Chinese spouses in the New Zealand environment is based on a number of factors. The spouses' acculturation process is particularly influenced by variables such as (1) the amount of information and knowledge of New Zealand they have prior to arrival in New Zealand, (2) the backgrounds of the spouses, (3) their experiences prior to and on arrival in New Zealand, (4) the ability to cope in the new environment.

The results of this study show that most of the spouses had very little information about New Zealand prior to coming, in other words, they were not well prepared for the expatriation experience even though most of them were very excited about the prospect of moving to another country. However, this study also shows that there is a significant relationship between the amount of information obtained by the spouses before coming to New Zealand and their adjustment to the new environment. The more information the spouses had about New Zealand and its culture the better the adjustment they made. Thus, the possibility of reducing the culture shock and increasing the chance of adapting to the new culture is reflected in the value placed on information.

In past theoretical cross-cultural adjustment research, previous international experience has been considered an important personal variable, because it has been argued that individuals could form abstractions and generalisations based on past cross-cultural adjustments, extrapolate and apply these generalisations to new adjustment situation, and thereby facilitate the current adjustment (Black, 1988; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991; Church, 1982; Torbiorn, 1982). Their assertion appears to be supported by this study. The results of this study demonstrate that although only about a quarter of the spouses had previous overseas experience, and that those that had such experience tended to be more positive about New Zealand than those who had no prior experience. The study also showed that the spouses with overseas experience were coping better with the New Zealand culture and socialised more with local people. Thus, previous overseas experience is an important factor influencing adaptation in a cross-cultural adjustment.

When people encounter difficulties, they often react emotionally, but not simply because of the difficulties themselves, rather, their reactions stem from the contrast between their expectations and the reality. The results of

the study reveal that almost all the spouses had jobs in China and in general, they were quite happy with their (working and family) lives in China. Most of them came to New Zealand for a better life, but after they arrived, life in New Zealand was not as good as they had expected. They were faced with a number of difficulties such as unemployment, language problems, high cost of living and cultural difficulties. Their expectations had not been met in reality and this was another factor causing the low level of satisfaction about their new life in New Zealand.

The Expatriation Experience of the Chinese Spouse in New Zealand

The results of this study show that most of the spouses kept close ties with the people of their home culture, were not coping well in the New Zealand culture, and did not socialise with the local people much. Less than one-third of the spouses expressed a desire to stay in New Zealand permanently.

The results show that there is significant support for all the hypotheses in this study, except for one H8, which though not significant has strong support (t-test $df=91$, $p=0.068$).

Conclusion

The research objectives in the study were to examine the adjustment and adaptability of new Chinese immigrant spouse and to identify the factors influencing their acculturation process in New Zealand. Work opportunities, language, cost of living, relationship with local people and local culture were identified as the most important factors that caused the spouses the greatest problems while living in New Zealand. The study also found that the spouses' adjustment and adaptability were strongly influenced by their backgrounds, overall experience and attitudes.

Regarding these tentative conclusions, two limitations are important to keep in mind. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study to some extent limits the causal influences that can be drawn from the results. However, a number of the antecedent variables were quite objective in nature and therefore were not as affected by this design limitation. For example, the spouses' previous overseas experience was related to spouses' general and interactive adjustment. Second, the limitation stemming from the sampling strategy should also be acknowledged as the sample size was small (97) and the bias caused by this sample size could not be avoided. Thus, the findings should be limited to the population studied.

Clearly, more rigorous and perhaps longitudinal research is required beyond this preliminary research if a more sophisticated understanding of the adjustment process of the spouses is to be gained.

References

- Adler, N. J. (1986). *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour*, Belmont, California: Kent.
- Black, J. S. (1988). Workrole transitions: A Study of American Expatriate Managers in Japan, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 19, pp. 274-291.
- Black, J. S., and Mendenhall, M. (1990). Cross-Cultural training effectiveness: A review and a theoretical framework for future research, *Academy of Management Review*, 15(1), pp. 113-136.
- Black, J. S., and Stephens, G. K. (1989). The Influence of the Spouse on American Expatriate Adjustment and Intent to Stay in Pacific Rim Overseas Assignments, *Journal of Management*, 15 (4), pp. 529-544.
- Black, J. S., Mendenhall, B., and Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives, *Academy of Management Review*, 16 (2), pp. 291-317.
- Brett, J. (1980) The effect of job transfers on employees and their families. In C.L. Cooper and R. Payne (eds). *Current concerns in occupational stress*, 99-136. New York: Random house.
- Church, A.T. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 9, pp. 540-572
- Earley, C. (1987). Intercultural training for managers: A comparison for documentary and interpersonal methods, *Academy of Management Journal*, 30, pp. 685-698.
- Gullahorn, J.R. and Gullahorn J.E (1962). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis, *Journal of Social Issues*, 3, pp. 33-47.
- Harris, P., and Moran, Q. T. (1991). *Managing cultural difference*, 3rd edition, Houston, Texas: Gulf Publications.
- Harvey, M.G. (1985, Spring). The Executive Family: An overlooked variable in international assignments, *Columbia Journal of World Business*, pp.84-92.
- Kim, Y. (1977). Communication patterns of foreign immigrants in the process of acculturation. *Human communications Research*. 4, pp. 66-77.
- Kim, Y. Y. (1988). *Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., England.
- Kim, Y.Y and Gudykunst, W.B. (1987), *Cross-cultural adaptation: Current approaches*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- McCoy, M.M. (1985). The successful expatriate family, *Euro Asian Business Review*, 5 (2), pp. 5-10.

Nicholson, N. (1984). A theory of work role transitions. *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*, 29, pp. 172-191.

Oberg, K. (1960). Culture Shock: adjustments to new cultural environments, *Practical Anthropologist*, 7, pp. 177-182.

Parasuraman, S. and Greenhaus, J.H., Rabinowitz, S., Bedeian, A.G, A.G and Mossholder K.W. (1989). Work and Family variables as mediators of the relationship between wives' employment and husbands' well-being, *Academy of Management Journal*, 32, pp. 185-201.

Ruben, I and D.J. Kealey (1979), Behavioural assessment of communication competency and the prediction of cross-cultural adjustment, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 3, pp. 15-47.

Selvarajah, C. (2000). The Mechanics of Expatriation: The Development of an Expatriate Acculturation Process Model, In S. B. Dahiya (Editor) *The Current State of Business Disciplines*, New Delhi: Spellbound Publications.

Selvarajah, C. (1998). Expatriate Acculturation Process: A Study of the Adaptation Patterns of New Immigrants. In G. Ogunmokun and R. Gabbay (Eds), *Contemporary Issues in International Business and Marketing*, Perth: Academic Press, pp. 281-303.

Statistics New Zealand (1997). 1996 New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.

Statistics New Zealand (1998). New Zealand now: People born overseas. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.

Thompson, A. (1986). Australian expatriate wives and business success in South East Asia, *Euro Asia Business Review*, 5(2), pp. 14-18.

Torbiorn, I. (1982). *Living Abroad*, New York: Wiley.

Tung, R. (1981). Selecting and Training of Personnel for Overseas Assignments, *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 16, pp. 68-78.

Tung, R. (1988). *The new Expatriates*, New York: Ballinger.

**The Expatriation
Experience of the
Chinese Spouse
in New Zealand**

This article has been cited by:

1. Eunsil Lee, Nam-Kyu Park. 2012. Perceived Cultural Housing Differences and Residential Satisfaction: A Case Study of Korean Sojourners. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 41:10.1111/fcsr.2012.41.issue-2, 131-144. [[CrossRef](#)]
2. Christopher Selvarajah. 2004. Equal employment opportunity: acculturation experience of immigrant medical professionals in New Zealand in the period 1995 to 2000. *Equal Opportunities International* 23:6, 50-73. [[Abstract](#)] [[PDF](#)]