

Cross-Cultural Challenges in Indonesian Workplaces: A Systematic Literature Review of Chinese Expatriate Adaptation in Companies in Indonesia

Pingki Duwi Kristanti

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Bangkalan, Indonesia

E-Mail: pingkiduwikristanti@gmail.com

Andika Prasetya

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Bangkalan, Indonesia

E-Mail: andika.ugm@gmail.com

Ahmat Dedi Prayogo

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Bangkalan, Indonesia

E-Mail: adedyprayoga17@gmail.com

Mochammad Isa Anshori

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Bangkalan, Indonesia

E-Mail: isa.anshori@trunojoyo.ac.id

Helmi Buyung Aulia Safrizal

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura; Bangkalan, Indonesia

E-Mail: helmi.safrizal@trunojoyo.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The growing number of Chinese expatriates in Indonesian companies has become an interesting subject for academics and business practitioners in cross-cultural management studies. The increasing number of Chinese workers entering Indonesia will make them experience barriers in communication. The existence of communication barriers when adapting will certainly have the potential for misunderstanding and even conflict. The way expatriates adapt to the new environment is something that needs to be considered, with differences in ethics and culture, it is feared that it can become a conflict in the business world. This research was conducted using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, a research method used to identify, analyze, evaluate, and interpret all previous research results obtained by researchers. The selected literature contained six articles that were in accordance with the research topic. The literature obtained discusses conflicts that often occur between Chinese workers and local workers due to cultural differences, such as differences in terms of work ethic, discipline, and non-verbal styles that can cause misunderstanding.

Keywords: Chinese expatriates, Adaptation, Cultural diversity, Conflict management

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ABSTRAK

Expatriat China yang semakin banyak di perusahaan Indonesia telah menjadi subjek yang menarik bagi akademisi dan praktisi bisnis dalam kajian manajemen lintas budaya. Semakin banyaknya tenaga kerja China yang masuk ke Indonesia, hal ini akan membuat mereka mengalami hambatan dalam berkomunikasi. Adanya hambatan komunikasi saat beradaptasi tentunya akan berpotensi terjadi kesalahpahaman bahkan terjadi konflik. Cara ekspatriat dalam beradaptasi dengan lingkungan baru menjadi hal yang perlu diperhatikan, dengan perbedaan etika dan budaya akan dikhawatirkan dapat menjadi konflik dalam dunia bisnis. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR), metode penelitian yang digunakan dengan cara melakukan identifikasi, menganalisis, mengevaluasi dan menafsirkan atas semua hasil penelitian sebelumnya yang peneliti peroleh. Literatur yang terpilih terdapat enam artikel yang sesuai dengan topik penelitian. Literatur yang didapatkan membahas konflik seringkali terjadi diantara pekerja China dan pekerja Lokal dikarenakan perbedaan budaya yang mana terdapat perbedaan dari segi etos kerja dan kedisiplinan serta gaya nonverbal yang dapat menyebabkan terjadinya kesalahpahaman.

Kata Kunci: *Expatriat China, Adaptasi, Keaneragaman Budaya, Pengelolaan Konflik*

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, many types of multinational companies have been operating worldwide, including in Indonesia. "With the development of businesses, competition in international business is becoming increasingly intense. Foreign direct investment is also one form of international business activity. This business begins when a company from one country invests its capital in another country" (Ananda & Prasetya, 2016; Griffin & Pustay, 2007).

To attract foreign investment, Indonesia has been developing its infrastructure, thereby inviting a considerable amount of investment into the country. One of the impacts is the increasing number of foreign companies entering Indonesia and employing foreign workers in their companies. According to data from the Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM), the country that invests the most in Indonesia is Singapore, followed by Japan, Hong Kong, China/PRC, and South Korea. This means that companies from China and Hong Kong, which are part of China, are expanding into Indonesia. Hence, it is reasonable that there are now many expatriates from China entering Indonesia (Ahmad, 2020).

With the increasing number of Chinese workers entering Indonesia, they may face communication barriers in the new environment where they work due to differences in cultural background and language with the local community. Communication barriers during adaptation could potentially lead to misunderstandings or even conflicts.

These cultural differences are crucial for expatriates or foreign workers to possess good ethics to blend in with Indonesian culture since Indonesia highly values ethics and morality. Concepts have emerged aiming to address challenges for organizations operating in strategic and dynamic environments that require good management. The cultural differences or practices of Chinese workers applied in the company might not be directly accepted in the local workforce environment, potentially leading to misunderstandings due to these cultural differences. Differences in educational background, knowledge, and the way Chinese workers think might not necessarily be accepted by local workers, hence possibly causing misunderstandings (Aldilal et al., 2020).

The significant number of Chinese expatriates in Indonesian companies has become an interesting subject for academics and business practitioners in cross-cultural management studies. In this context, analysis through a literature review method becomes an important tool to gain an in-depth understanding of the level of adaptation of Chinese expatriates in Indonesia. This article aims to present a systematic synthesis of theoretical

understanding, empirical findings, and current trends found in related literature. By exploring key dimensions such as social, cultural, and organizational aspects, as well as adaptation strategies applied by Chinese expatriates, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive insight into the factors influencing their adaptation process in the context of Indonesian companies. Through a systematic literature review approach, this article is expected to make a significant contribution to enriching the understanding of international human resource management, particularly regarding the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in a different cultural working environment such as Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resources

Globalization has had an impact on human culture and behavior in various contexts, especially in the context of human resources (HR). Human Resources is an extremely important asset that significantly influences a company's progress in achieving success. HR management itself is both a science and an art that regulates the relationships and roles of the workforce to be effective and efficient in helping to achieve the company's goals (Mahapatro, 2022; Wahyuni & Syamsir, 2020). They also need to implement workplace practices based on attitudes that uphold fundamental rights in the workplace and international labor standards while fostering good HR management relationships as a crucial element to enhance productivity and create decent jobs. These principles apply to all companies" (Ilim et al., 2023).

Ethics in Human Resource Management

Ethics can be defined as the values of behavior exhibited by individuals or organizations in their interactions with their environment (Afsar & Umrani, 2020). Ethics involves moral principles that guide the actions of an individual or group in meeting recognized standards of behavior. Another perspective by Bertens states that ethics can also be understood as synonymous with morality, reflecting the values and norms accepted by society (Kamilah et al., 2023). Northouse (2017) states that ethical character theory is crucial in forming strong relationships between leaders and their subordinates. Leaders who possess good moral qualities can build the trust and respect necessary to achieve organizational goals. Additionally, ethical leaders can make fair decisions and consider the welfare and interests of all parties involved.

In conclusion, Northouse asserts that ethical character theory plays a significant role in ethical and effective leadership. Ethical leaders are those who demonstrate good moral qualities and consistently practice them in their actions and decisions. Therefore, ethics is considered a discipline that discusses what is good and bad, as well as moral rights and obligations (Ami & Anshori, 2023).

Cultural Diversity

Communication involving more than one cultural element is also known as intercultural communication. According to Sihabudin in Aljufry & Abidin (2020), intercultural communication involves elements originating from different cultural backgrounds. These different cultural elements make the interaction styles of each culture unique and distinct from one another. This occurs because culture and communication merge to form a social framework inherent in individuals with specific cultures. However, a lack of ability to communicate effectively and understand others' needs can result in misunderstandings and discomfort within a team, hindering progress and desired outcomes (Nursalim et al., 2023).

Febiyana & Turistiati (2019) and Griffin & Pustay (2007) state that cross-cultural communication is usually used for theories and research that compare interpersonal variables such as conversational distance, self-disclosure, and conflict resolution styles in two or more different cultures. A literature review is a written summary of articles in journals, books, and other documents describing current and past theories and knowledge,

organizing literature into necessary topics and documents required (Az-Zahroh et al., 2023).

Cross-cultural communication is a field of study that examines how people from different cultural backgrounds communicate, both in similar and different ways among them, and how they strive for cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication is the process of transferring communication from one person with a specific cultural background to another person with a different social background (Liliweri, 2003). Cross-cultural communication involves communication among people with different cultures, such as international groups, inter-ethnic, and inter-social groups (Samovar & Porter, 1976). Furthermore, cross-cultural communication is communication involving communication participants representing individuals, interpersonal relationships, and intergroups, based on differences in cultural backgrounds that influence the communication attitudes of the participants (Dodd, 1991).

In addition to communication, discipline can also have an impact on adaptation. (Nurhuda et al., 2019), In their article, they mentioned that discipline is a management action to encourage employees to comply with various demands. In other words, employee discipline is a form of training that aims to improve and shape the attitudes and behaviors of employees so that they voluntarily cooperate with other employees to achieve increased work performance. With employee discipline, expatriates can willingly collaborate to achieve the company's goals.

Conflict Management

According to Luthans in Dhaviyanti & Al Musadieq (2017), there are three issues contributing to constraints in cross-cultural leadership: firstly, stereotyping issues; secondly, ethnocentrism issues; and thirdly, perception issues. Before receiving international assignments, an expatriate must prepare to live and work in a new place with a different culture, both professionally and personally. This aims to prevent culture shock and ease the expatriate's adaptation to the local culture. The success of an organization depends significantly on leadership's ability to adapt in a broader, highly dynamic international environment filled with opportunities and challenges. Understanding culture and expatriate adaptation skills in cross-cultural practice become essential for leadership effectiveness in international business. In this regard, individuals in organizations must be able to apply conflict management, both within and outside the organization, based on the relationships they build with both internal and external parties. If managers or company leaders can implement conflict management, they can effectively control conflicts within and outside the organization (Haidarravy & Anshori, 2023).

METHODS

The research methodology employed in this article is a qualitative approach through a literature review. This approach aims to systematically synthesize literature related to the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in companies in Indonesia. The study will gather data from relevant academic sources such as journals, books, scholarly publications, and other credible sources discussing the topic of expatriate adaptation.

The first step in this methodology involves identifying and selecting literature sources that align with the research focus, using relevant keywords related to the adaptation of Chinese expatriates in the context of companies in Indonesia. Once these sources are collected, an analysis of the literature content will be conducted, encompassing key aspects influencing the level of adaptation, such as social, cultural, and organizational factors, adaptation strategies employed, and the experiences of Chinese expatriates in adapting.

This literature review process will involve a critical analysis approach to the selected literature, comparing and synthesizing existing findings and perspectives. Subsequently, the results of this analysis will be systematically organized into a comprehensive synthesis, presenting an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the level of adaptation of Chinese expatriates in companies in Indonesia.

This qualitative literature review methodology aims to provide a comprehensive and current overview of expatriate adaptation while making a significant contribution to the understanding of international human resource management in the context of cross-cultural environments within the global workplace.

RESULTS

Research Question

The research questions are formulated according to the needs and topic of the research. The questions that became a reference in writing the article can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Question

ID	Research Question	Motivation
RQ1	What are the most popular topics related to Chinese expatriates in companies in Indonesia?	Identify the popular topics related to Chinese expatriates in companies in Indonesia.
RQ2	What methods do Chinese expatriates use to adapt within Indonesian companies?	“Identify the efforts made by Chinese expatriates to adapt quickly within Indonesian companies.

Literature Search

The literature search process was carried out by seeking relevant journal sources or articles related to the research questions. The search engines used to find relevant journals or articles were Publish or Perish and Google Scholar.

Google Scholar is a search engine specialized in academic literature and research. It is provided by Google and designed to facilitate access to scholarly articles, papers, books, theses, abstracts, and other academic resources. Meanwhile, Publish or Perish is an application that assists in calculating several important metrics used in evaluating academic performance, such as citation counts, journal impact factors, h-index, and others. Google Scholar was chosen because it allows searching for relevant and indexed journals, and it also enables filtering by publication year, providing search results that meet research needs.

Inclusion Criteria

During this stage, filtration and assessment were conducted to determine whether a journal or literature could be used as a data source in this research. The criteria chosen by the authors were: 1. Literature includes articles or journals; 2. The literature’s research method is qualitative; 3. The literature can be found in Google Scholar; 4. Publications in the last 5 years, from 2019 to 2023; 5. The research subjects in the literature are Chinese expatriates; 6. The literature discusses the adaptation of expatriates from China working in companies located in Indonesia.

The protocol used was the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) using the Confidence application with several stages. First, the identification stage. Ninety-three pieces of literature related to the adaptation of Chinese expatriates were identified using the Google Scholar database on Publish or Perish with a publication year restriction from 2019 to 2023. Second, the screening stage. Out of the 93 pieces of literature, one was identified as a duplicate. Subsequently, a review of titles and abstracts revealed 68 pieces of literature that were irrelevant. Finally, a full-text review was conducted, identifying 13 pieces of literature that did not match the research topic and 5 pieces that did not align with the research population. Third, the final stage. At this stage, six pieces of literature were obtained, all utilizing a qualitative approach and being relevant to the research topic.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The selected literature resulted from screening among 93 pieces of literature obtained from the Google Scholar database using the Publish or Perish application. Further filtration was conducted based on inclusion criteria and full-text review using Confidence,

resulting in the identification of 6 articles that align with the research topic. The outcomes of the literature search are shown in Table 2.

In the data table above, it can be observed that related literature limited from 2019 to 2023 only yielded 6 pieces of literature. Among these, 2 were published in 2020, another 2 in 2021, and 2 in 2023. Based on the analysis of these four pieces of literature, it was found that conflicts frequently occur among Chinese expatriates or workers from China, leading to disharmony within the company due to differences in salaries, causing social jealousy (Aldilal et al., 2020). Moreover, the renowned work ethic and strong discipline in Chinese culture often create pressure for local workers (Lampe, 2021). Additionally, conflicts frequently arise due to non-verbal communication involving facial expressions, intonation, body language, and other supportive means, leading to misunderstandings (Lestari et al., 2023). Fundamentally, the ethnic Chinese prefer a direct 'to-the-point' approach in communication, aiming to please their conversational partners. Moreover, in conflict resolution, they tend to employ compromise by involving other colleagues to collaborate in problem-solving and, to handle differences, they tend to tolerate certain limitations (Aljufry & Abidin, 2020).

Table 2. The Selected Literature

No	Author's ann year	Journal names
1	Dian Trianita Lestari, Sultrayansa, Rahman Ako, 2023	Jurnal Communio : Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi
2	Tengku Fenny Rifalny Aljufry, Sholihul Abidin, 2020	Intelektiva : Jurnal Ekonomi, Sosial & Humaniora
3	Aldilal, Andi Alimudin Unde, Jeanny Marua Fatimah, 2020	Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi (J-IKA)
4	Ilyas Lampe, 2021	PRofesi Humas
5	Sheyra Silvia Siregar, Diah Prasetyani, Umi Hanifah Zahra Ghazaly, 2023	Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Nusantara (JPKMN)
6	Imam Busthomi, 2021	Jejaring Administrasi Publik

Hence, efforts are required to prevent conflicts in the company, one of which is by providing Indonesian language training. A survey conducted among Chinese employees in a multinational company in Central Java revealed that 90% of the participants expressed great interest because Indonesian language proficiency is highly necessary for effective communication. Meanwhile, 6% of the respondents stated mild interest, reasoning that being proficient in English alone is sufficient, and 4% responded that they lacked interest in learning a foreign language for other reasons (Siregar et al., 2023). Facilitating cross-cultural adaptation is crucial for foreign workers intending to serve in the host country (Busthomi, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In this era of globalization, numerous multinational companies are operating worldwide, including in Indonesia. One of the countries that heavily invests in Indonesia is China. Chinese workers often encounter communication barriers in adapting to a new environment where they work due to differences in cultural backgrounds and language with the local community. Communication barriers during adaptation may potentially lead to misunderstandings and even conflicts. We conducted an analysis using the SLR method regarding the level of adaptation of Chinese workers. From the selected literature, it's evident that conflicts frequently arise between Chinese and local workers due to cultural disparities, particularly in work ethics and discipline. Additionally, non-verbal communication styles often trigger misunderstandings, mainly because many Chinese workers still cannot speak Indonesian. However, amidst all these causes of conflict, fundamentally, the Chinese ethnicity prefers a direct 'to-the-point' approach with kindness, and in conflict resolution, they tend to employ compromise and are inclined to tolerate differences within certain limits. Language training is crucial in assisting the adaptation level of foreign workers, and this training should be facilitated by the companies recruiting foreign workers to work within their organizations.

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