

Full Length Research Paper

Social support, overseas adjustments and work performance of foreign labors in Taiwan

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The study uses social support as a dependent variable to explore the relationship among social support, overseas adjustment and work performance of the foreign labours of high technology firms at export and processing zone in Taiwan. A questionnaire survey was used and, out of a total of 518 sent questionnaires, 213 valid ones were collected for data analysis. Findings are: 1) The higher the level of social support, the better the adjustment to living overseas; 2) The higher the level of social support, the better the work performance of the individual; 3) Better overseas adjustment leads to enhanced work performance of the foreign labours; 4) The relationship of overseas adjustments to social support and work performance has a partially mediating effect.

Keywords: Social support, overseas adjustments, work performance, foreign labours, Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of the level of sophistication of machine facilities, the human resource is the key factor in determining the failure or success of a business. In Taiwan, the size and influence of the foreign workforce renders it a group that cannot be ignored. Despite a plethora of discussions and studies related to workers from overseas, to date, there has been a lack of research into foreign labours in the export and processing zone. The companies in this zone are distinct from others in that they belong principally to the high-tech manufacturing sector and rely upon large numbers of foreign labours. As such, they merit deeper exploration because the successful handling of the human resource of expatriates is crucial in the hiring of the workforce.

When foreign labours first enter an unknown country or environment, they can experience considerable pressure arising from the need to learn a different language, new patterns of behavior and a new life-style as well as from the experiencing of feelings of insecurity. As a consequence, work performance can be affected. Receiving support or help minimizes the effects on work performance and the intensity of the adjustments made. A

large number of studies on overseas adjustments have focused on international exchange students and overseas personnel (Tsang, 2001), or have emphasized the effect of personal characteristics on adjustments overseas (Huang et al., 2005). However, there remains a lack of research into foreign labours (Kraimer et al., 2001). At the same time, scholars in overseas personnel studies have examined the use of pressure management to reduce the feelings of insecurity experienced by overseas workers (Black et al., 1991). Researchers have also found that social support can effectively lower the uncertainty of overseas employees in new surroundings through the use of pressure management (Feldman and Brett, 1983; Pinder and Schroeder, 1987). Moreover, the degree of overseas adjustment required for foreign labours can be lowered when they receive social support. However, in studies to date, there has been little elaboration on the work performance of this group of workers.

Although the recruitment of foreign labours has solved the basic employment problem faced by the export and processing zone, the consequence of this is that management is necessarily concerned not only with finding ways to satisfy the industry's needs, but also with strategies for managing foreign labours to maximize their work performance level. In light of this, the present research adopts a social support viewpoint to explore the

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issue of the overseas adjustment and work performance of expatriate workers. It is hoped that this study will provide concrete suggestions for the appropriate government departments or merchant concerns with respect to the 300,000 overseas workers in Taiwan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social support is the availability and quality of helping relationships (Leavy, 1983). If an individual receives help in their new surroundings from others, that help will assist his or her adjustments to the environment, especially when difficulties are encountered (Tsang, 2001). Social support is an interpersonal quality or functionality of interactive content (Berkman, 1985; Cohen and Willis, 1985). In this study, we discuss the interaction quality, frequency and content of expatriate workers' social networks, the targets of which are either providing or receiving care and view these workers as short-term migrants. The interaction targets might not simply be work colleagues, superiors, roommates and association members, but also family members, parents, children, spouses, friends and relatives.

Kahn and Quinn (1976) identify three types of social support: aid, affect and affirmation. Aid relates to the providing of social support for urgency-related information and assistance. Affect pertains to the support of providers and the seeking of support provided by the relationship between the affect supports. Affirmation relates to the support provider's belief in the support seeker's ability to handle pressure and affirm convictions (Kraimer et al., 2001). Copland et al. (1975) focus on individual access to sources of social support from organizations, colleagues, superiors, friends and so on. Among them, organization, supervisors and the family are the most important sources of support for overseas personnel (Kraimer et al., 2001). Aycan (1997) and Payne (1980) believe that organizational support is the main factor in the adjustments of overseas personnel. In the present study, we explore the impact of social support for expatriate workers in their overseas adjustment and highlight three sources of support for this group of workers: group social support, work social support and contact with home country.

Adjustment is often referred to as an important concept in psychology and spiritual medical research. This means that the adjustment of an individual is affected by environmental or personal factors. Although several different terms are used in adjustment research, such as international adjustments, adjustments to residence abroad, and cross-cultural adjustments of overseas personnel (Tsang, 2001; Kraimer et al., 2001), they all simply describe the individual's adjustments to a new environment resulting from the different cultural context in the psychological sense of comfort. In addition, some studies point out that the appropriate behavior of the

individual in learning about a new culture may reduce their feelings of insecurity and increase their level of psychological comfort (Nicholson, 1984; Black and Gregersen, 1991).

Research into overseas adjustments may be divided into two categories of respondents: Overseas personnel adjustments and students adjusting to studies overseas (Tsang, 2001). Early overseas adjustments research measured a single dimension (Oberg, 1960; Torbiorn, 1982). Black (1988); Black and Stephens (1989) spearheaded a shift towards differentiating overseas adjustments into three categories: General adjustment, interaction adjustment and job adjustment. General adjustment refers to an individual's adaptations in living and customs or culture. Interaction adjustment relates to the interaction between an individual and the people of the host country. Job adjustment pertains to adaptation to the assignment of overseas personnel. The studies of Black and Mendenhall (1990); Black et al. (1998) identify three dimensions to analysis of overseas adjustments: work adjustment, interaction adjustment and overall adjustment. Shaffer et al. (1999) use job adjustment, interaction adjustment and general adjustment as their empirical dimensions.

With respect to the studies on students studying overseas, most focus on the learning and adaptation of foreign students in the United States (Pruitt, 1978; Wong-Rieger, 1984; Ying and Liese, 1991, 1994). More recent research discusses countries other than USA (Tsai, 1995; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Ward et al., 1998). Huang et al. (2005) explore the relationship between overseas adjustments and life satisfaction of international exchange students using exchange student participants in the National Sun Yat-sen University School of Management as samples. Tsang (2001) adopts Black's (1988, 1990) research into three dimensions of adjustments: General, interaction and work adjustments, introducing the first two dimensions to the analysis of international exchange students' adjustments. He also believes there are relations between adjustment and performance that should be explored with respect to international exchange students. However, the adjustments of exchange students relate not solely to culture, but also to the problems particular to students, for example, school pressure (Sam, 2001; Bochner et al., 1997). In light of this, Huang et al. (2005) explore three dimensions of international exchange students including general, interaction and learning adjustments when studying overseas. They also use overseas adjustments as the concept of international exchange students' adjustments.

The majority of related overseas literature focuses on the adjustments of international exchange students or overseas personnel (Tsang, 2001) and emphasizes the influence of personal characteristics on overseas adjustments (Huang et al., 2005). However, the relationship between social support and overseas adjustments

of expatriate workers is seldom discussed (Kraimer et al., 2001). As a result of the lack of reference material in this area, the present study adopts the three dimensions utilized in the studies referred to above: life adjustment, work adjustment and interaction adjustment.

Performance is a measurement of the degree to which certain goals have been reached. French (1985) believes performance is an action necessary to attain a particular goal. In empirical research, there are a number of differences in the work performance items due to the adopting of different samples. Such differences arise inevitably from the differences in organizational goals and structure which lead to different performance goals. To date, there have been several different definitions of work performance among scholars. For example, Porter and Lawler (1965) believe work performance has three dimensions: Quantity of performance, quality of performance and the degree of performance. Therefore, work performance means the majority- or group-attained goal of beneficial results such as productivity, revenue growth rate, profit growth, market share, budgetary control, quality improvement, shortened time, cost reduction and customer satisfaction, and so on.

In recent years, human resource theory has been influenced by psychology studies, leading the definition of work performance increasingly to emphasize the measurement of behavior. Drawing on the role behavior theory of Katz and Kahn (1996); Campbell (1990) believes that work performance relates to the individual as an organization member adopting the behavior that accomplishes the organization's expectations, regulations and formal role demands. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) develop the model of Katz and Kahn (1996) by dividing work into inter and outer role behavior. Furthermore, they adopt two different factor performances, task performance and contextual performance, to measure work performance.

According to Borman and Motowidlo (1993), task performance refers to the contribution of workers to an organization's technical core, and represents proficiency in their duty that is measured by an individual's direct execution of technical procedure or indirect provision of materials or service required. The contextual performance mainly describes workers contributing to other activities of organizational efficiency besides their missions (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). For this reason, the measurement of contextual performance includes the voluntary implementing of unofficially stipulated activities, enthusiasm in keeping up and completing missions, cooperation with others, helping others, and willingness to agree with, support and defend organizational goals at an informal level.

From the aforementioned discussion of the literature relating to expatriate studies, it is apparent that the support of the mother and host country company is the main factor affecting expatriates' adjustment (Feldman and Thomas, 1992; Harvey, 1997; Kraimer et al., 2001).

Literature on the learning of overseas students also indicates that the support of the mother school and exchange school plays a key role in the adjustment of an overseas student (Tsang, 2001; Huang et al., 2005). The aforementioned discussion of the related literature reveals the existence of three forms of social support: assistance, emotion and affirmation. For expatriates, social support mainly comes from the organization (Harvey, 1997; Shaffer et al., 1999) and spouses (Black and Stephens, 1989). Kraimer et al. (2001) believes the organization, supervisors and family are the most important source of social support. According to the definition of the aforementioned literature, we believe that the social support for expatriate labor comes from the social support of the group, work and mother contact with the country; and the adjustment of overseas workers includes three levels: Life, work and interaction adjustment.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

According to the expatriate studies of Feldman and Thomas (1992), and Harvey (1997), company support from the mother country is crucial for expatriates. Florkowski and Fogel (1999) also point out that the financial support of the company for expatriate managers will affect their living and work adjustments. Aycan (1997) believes that the support of the home country company can reduce expatriates' insecurity and help their interaction adjustment in their overseas life. A large number of studies also point out the importance of the spouse's support in expatriates' overseas adjustment (Caliguiri et al., 1998; Harvey, 1998). Similarly, Yang and Clum (1995) assert that the family is one of the main supports for exchange students. Brett (1980) explicitly points out that the family can provide useful information and assistance, emotional support as well as affirmation for individuals, all of which are essential factors in helping individuals to overcome times of pressure. Likewise, expatriate workers are able to improve the quality of their life overseas and their capacity to adjust through home country contact and support. In light of this, we believe that the higher level of support from home country contact will be able to enhance the capacity of expatriate workers to adapt.

Drawing on the literature on international exchange students, Tsang (2001) claims that social support might impact on students' adjustment to their life as well as interaction. Collecting data from international students at the Institute of Management, Zhongshan University on the relationship between their level of satisfaction in their overseas lives and their overseas adjustment, Huang Yingzhong et al. (2005) also discover that the better the social support offered by the exchange schools, the better the students' adaptation to overseas life. The literature on expatriates enabled Kraimer et al. (2001) to postulate that the support provided by overseas companies in the target

countries enhances the level of expatriates' adjustment in their daily life as well as their work. In addition, both Aycan (1997) and Black et al. (1991) state that the information, welfare, language training and social opportunities provided by companies in the target countries help expatriates to adapt more effectively. Likewise, social support from those organizations and work places in the target countries also improve expatriates' capacity for effective adjustment overseas.

H₁: The stronger the social support, the more effective the overseas adjustments by foreign employees will be.

Kraimer et al. (2001) utilize the three dimensional model of adjustments proposed by Black et al. (1991) to predict expatriates' work effectiveness. Another focus of their research is on factors that enhance expatriates' adjustments to the target environment such as social support from companies, host countries, and the interaction between superiors and inferiors in the workplace as well as families. Research outcomes indicate that support from both the host countries and the interactional relationships between superiors and inferiors have a significant effect on the work performance of those expatriates. Social support for expatriate workers is mainly provided by their host families, relevant organisations and workplaces. Their families in the host countries provide them with useful information, emotional support and positive appraisal, all of which help the expatriate to overcome loneliness. With regard to the social support from organisations and workplaces, Miriam and David (2000) believe that those who offer social support could provide emotional assistance and useful information, enabling the recipients to resolve their problems and issues in their daily lives, thus freeing them from those pressures and burdens. The source of such support may include religious bodies, social clubs and associations. Support from colleagues as well as superiors further enhance the adjustment to the work. Based on the aforementioned, the present study assumes that social support from organizations and workplaces will help to improve expatriate work performance.

H₂: The greater the social support, the better the work performance of expatriates.

The research on expatriates mainly focuses on the relationship between expatriates' adjustments and their work performance. Parker and McEvoy (1993) point out that expatriates' work performance is related to their adjustments. Tsang (2001) furthers the studies on expatriates by exploring the connection between international exchange students and their overseas adjustments. Due to the fact that laws and regulations as well as different cultures exist in different nations and regions, people tend to feel anxious and uncomfortable psychologically because they fear breaking the local cultural prohibitions and misbehaving when they encounter a strange environment.

This is characterised by Oberg (1960) as 'culture shock' and the process of adjusting to such a cultural shock is defined as cross-cultural adjustment. The first challenge likely to face expatriates when they assume their duties overseas is the cross-cultural adjustment, namely, overseas adjustment. Once the expatriates have become familiarized with the new culture and customs as well as local laws and regulations, the symptoms of insecurity and discomfort will gradually vanish. Same with expatriate workers, if foreign labours adjust the working environment, they will have some contributions to the core organisational technology, and proficient performance in the job field. Besides missions, they are willing to do the voluntary implementing of unofficially stipulated activities, enthusiasm in keeping up and completing missions, cooperation with others, helping others, and willingness to agree with, support and defend organizational goals at an informal level; and all of these will enhance work performance. Therefore, expatriates' adjustments in daily life, interpersonal relationships and work will lead to better work performance.

H₃: The better the overseas adjustment, the better the work performances by overseas expatriates.

In the light of the three hypotheses listed, it is expected that the work performance of expatriates will be influenced by social support and overseas adjustment. In addition, the adjustment might play a mediating role between social support and work performance. For this reason, the study aims to explore the relationship among social support, overseas adjustment and work performance. In other words, the objective of the study is to establish whether overseas adjustment can function as a mediating viable which affects social support and work performance.

H₄: Eexpatriate's adjustment has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between social support and work performance.

METHODS

Sample and data collections

To ensure the creditability and validity of this questionnaire, we studied the relevant literature and adopted the scales utilized in previous studies while conducting interviews with experts to establishing the characteristics of the export and processing zone. Ascertaining the implication of constructs and ensuring that each statement captured the intended meaning of a specific sub-dimension of constructs, three researchers with expertise in organization behavior and human resources discussed and modified the survey. The modified survey was then confirmed and adjusted again through the pre-test involving employers with a minimum of five years' experience in managing expatriate workers.

In light of Chen et al. (1993) emphasis on the importance of using experts when developing surveys, we invited both researchers of human resources and employers experienced in managing

expatriate workers to examine each item to ensure that the survey was appropriate for our sample. For face validity, we invited three human resource researchers to review each item to ensure the consistency of items and operational definitions, easy understanding of each item, and to check whether it was necessary to remove or add items. Finally, three human resource researchers and three employers with a minimum of five years' experience in managing expatriate workers were invited to review all the items once more.

To remove any potential ambiguity from the items, a pilot test was conducted using a sample of 60 respondents from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam in three firms. The results of the 52 completed surveys returned revealed the Cronbach's α result of each factor to be all over 0.7 (among 0.71 - 0.89) indicating a high degree of credibility. After removing the ambiguities that were pointed out, the surveys were distributed.

Measures and validation

When considering the character of expatriate workers, social support was measured following the simple version of the perceived organizational support (POS) scale from Eisenberger et al. (1986). By means of Factor Analysis, 27 items were sorted to three factors: 1.) Group support: Expatriate workers receive social support from groups other than their workmates, such as religious groups, associations of fellow townsmen, family members and relatives. 2.) Workmate support: Expatriate workers also receive social support from their co-workers and supervisors. Included in this category are those overseas workers who feel suppressed at work, or have to work frequent overtime, as well as those satisfied with their salary and overtime pay. 3.) Support from motherland: Support from the motherland relates to the frequency with which expatriate workers call their families and return to their home countries. Cronbach's α of three factors are respectively 0.84, 0.80 and 0.91; total value is 0.85 signaling a high level of credibility.

Scale of overseas adjustment is adapted from the model of Black and Stephens (1989). Using factor analysis, 15 items were sorted to three factors: 1.) Work adjustment: The way in which expatriate workers adjust to the situation of work and tasks. It includes adjustments resulting from the differences in working procedures, policy, and requirements between previous home-country experiences and those in Taiwan. 2.) Life adjustment: the way expatriate workers adjust their lifestyles in Taiwan with respect to food, transportation, medication, climate, leisure activities and local culture. 3.) Interaction adjustment with locals: The interaction and communication between expatriate workers and locals, and focuses on the extent to which expatriates maintain good relations with locals. Cronbach's α of three factors are respectively 0.89, 0.83 and 0.81; total value is 0.88 representing a high degree of credibility.

Work performance was assessed using the 21-items scale developed by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). Cronbach's α is 0.89, indicating a high degree of credibility. The research also included sample characteristics as controlling variables, such as gender, education, language ability, overseas work experience and years staying in overseas as it is possible for these sample characteristics to affect the relationship between variables.

Expatriates in the high-tech industry of the export and processing zone from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam only were surveyed, and self-administrated questionnaires were used for all measures. We targeted expatriate employees working as operators and adopted the stratified-random-sampling method based on the actual numbers of workers hired. As the nationalities of the sample were varied, the structural survey was first developed in English and reviewed by experts for validity, before being translated into Thai and Vietnamese. Out of a total of 518 distributed surveys, 315 were completed and returned, comprising of 203 from Philippine workers, 77 from Thailand workers and 35 from Vietnamese workers. After reviewing, a total of 213 surveys, 152 from Philippines, 40 from

Thais and 21 from Vietnamese, were deemed valid for further analysis.

Common method variance control

As the perceptual measurement of dependent and independent variables comes from the same source, common method variance (CMV) can occur. The research result will cause additive bias because the linear confounding creates a spurious main effect (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; Podsakoff et al., 2003). In empirical researches, CMV has been found to create inflation (Williams et al., 1989) or deflation (Ganster et al., 1983) of the intension of variable correlation (Peng et al., 2006). As the results of our survey data are derived from the participants' self-report, there is a possibility of CMV in the research design.

To limit CMV, we adopted both advance protection and post hoc testing. In advance protection, we used a severity procedure to construct a measurement tool for variables in questionnaire contents. We also considered carefully the wording of the questionnaire in order to lower the risk of CMV and to avoid interrupting respondents. For post hoc testing, we adopted the suggestion of Anderson and Bateman (1997) to use Harman's single-factor post hoc analysis (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). After exploratory factor analysis, a single factor, which only explains a limited variance from non-rotation factor loading, was found and the explanation percentage of a factor does not show a gathering appearance, ensuring that the result was not distorted by the same data sources. On the basis of this logic and result, a single factor has only 9.77% of varimax, showing CMV not to be significant in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the valid surveys, 62.9% of our samples are female and 32.1% male. 64.8% are single and 35.2% married. The majority (57.9%) of their ages fall between 20 - 29 years, while 38.8% fall into the 30 - 39 year old age range. 71.23% of respondents have received college education while 30.45% have graduated from high school only. Very few either have gained higher degrees or have not finished high school. This data shows that most expatriate employees who work in the export and processing zone in Nan-Zip are relatively young and well educated. Moreover, 83.52% can speak languages other than their mother tongue. 37.25% have never worked in Taiwan before. 42.91% of them have worked in Taiwan for one to three years, while 38.48% of them have worked in Taiwan around four to six years, and 16.31% have worked there for less than one year. With respect to their wages, 90.81% of them earn less than NT\$25,000. 46.19% earn between NT\$15,001- 20,000, while 29.13% earn less than NT\$ 15,000. 15.49% of workers earn between NT\$20,001- 25,000.

As shown in Table 1, the correlation matrix for the research constructs, illustrates a positive relationship between social support and overseas adjustments. Furthermore, the results in model 2 of Table 2 show that the support from groups, workmates and motherland are all statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the greater the social support received by expatriate workers, the better their overseas adjustment. Thus, Hypothesis

Table 1. Correlation matrix of the constructs.

Variable	M	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Group support	3.67	0.49											
Workmate support	3.81	0.43	0.25**										
Support from motherland	3.73	0.47	0.27**	0.34**									
Work adjustment	3.98	0.96	0.36**	0.41**	0.35**								
Life adjustment	3.93	0.74	0.42**	0.38**	0.30**	0.42**							
Interaction adjust with locals	3.59	0.66	0.40**	0.36**	0.32**	0.28**	0.32**						
Work performance	3.45	0.87	0.35**	0.46**	0.33**	0.39**	0.41**	0.38**					
Gender	1.68	0.75	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.05				
Education	3.13	0.83	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.10*	0.11*	0.12*	0.15*			
Language ability	3.26	0.80	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.07		
Overseas work Experience	3.01	0.75	0.04	0.06	0.02	-0.13*	0.20**	-0.05	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.01	
Seniority	3.11	0.77	0.06	0.05	0.04	-0.07	0.18*	0.15*	0.16*	0.21**	0.01	0.02	0.06

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

1 is supported by the results. Table 1 also reveals a positive relationship between social support and work performance. The results in model 2 of Table 3 also show that support from groups, workmates and motherland are all statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the greater the social support received by expatriate workers, the better their work performance. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported by the results.

In Table 1, the results show a positive relationship between overseas adjustments and work performance. Furthermore, the results in model 3 of Table 3 reveal that life adjustment, work adjustment and interaction adjustment with locals are all statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that the greater the level of overseas adjustments achieved by expatriate workers, the better their work performance. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported by the results.

This research also tests the possible mediation between variables. According to the suggestions of Baron and Kenny (1986), hierarchical

regression analysis is adopted to examine the mediation of overseas adjustments. As both social support and overseas adjustments have significantly positive effects on work performance (models 4 and 5 in Table 3); and the social support also shows significant influence on overseas adjustments (model 3 in Table 2), the social support and overseas adjustments are both included for further analysis of mediation effects. After controlling the overseas adjustments, the mediator, β coefficients shown in model 6 in Table 3 changes from 0.17 - 0.12 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a reduction in the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. Consequently, the partial mediation from the overseas adjustments is confirmed and Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Conclusion

Based on Hypothesis 1, we know the greater the support from groups, workmates and motherland,

the better the overseas adjustments of expatriate workers (Yang and Clum, 1995; Caliguiri et al., 1998; Harvey, 1998). In other words, the way in which expatriates adjust their lives in Taiwan is influenced significantly by the amount of social support they receive. Such support includes that from co-workers and supervisors; support from religious groups, community groups and fellow associations; and contact and interaction with family members, relatives, and friends in their homeland. Based on Hypothesis 2, we know the higher the level of support from groups, workmates and motherland, the better the work performance of expatriate workers (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993; Kraimer et al., 2001). Their work performance is enhanced when they receive social support from their co-workers and supervisors; from religious groups, community groups and fellow associations; and from the contact and interaction with family members, relatives, and friends in their homeland. Based on Hypothesis 3, the better the adaptation to life in Taiwan made by

Table 2. Regression analysis between social support and overseas adjustment.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	0.04	0.01	0.02
Education	0.10*	0.06	0.03
Language Ability	0.07	0.02	0.04
Overseas work experience	0.08	-0.03	0.02
Seniority	0.11*	0.05	0.05
Group support		0.24**	
Workmate support		0.27**	
Support from motherland		0.31**	
Social support			0.18**
R ²	0.37	0.43	0.41
Adjust R ²	0.34	0.39	0.38
F-Value	8.36***	10.77***	11.83***

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

Table 3. Regression of social support, overseas adjustment and work performance.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.03
Education	0.12*	0.07	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.08
Language ability	0.06	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.02	0.04
Overseas work experience	0.09	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02
Seniority	0.13*	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.05	0.05
Group support		0.25**				
Workmate support		0.32**				
Support from motherland		0.28**				
Work adjustment			0.31**			
Life adjustment			0.25**			
Interaction adjustment			0.29**			
Social support				0.17**		0.12*
Overseas adjustment					0.15*	0.10*
R ²	0.27	0.32	0.30	0.25	0.28	0.29
Adjust R ²	0.10	0.28	0.27	0.22	0.25	0.26
F-Value	7.68***	10.31***	12.15***	10.38***	11.53***	12.99***

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

expatriate workers, the better their work performance (Parker and McEvoy, 1993; Tsang, 2001). Consequently, expatriates' work performance is improved significantly as they build up good interaction and communication with locals and adjust well both in respect to their lives and work. According to Hypothesis 4, overseas adjustments play a mediating role between social support and work performance, as the social support influences overseas adjustments significantly and its influence on work performance decreases while controlling overseas adjustments. In other words, overseas adjustments mediate the

relationship between social support and work performance. Therefore, social support can improve work performance by overseas adjustments of expatriate workers.

Implications and research contributions

This study assesses the work performance of expatriate workers through the lens of social support and overseas adjustments, and obtains statistical significance of all

hypotheses. Although previous literature has focused on the influences of social support and overseas adjustments on overseas students and personnel, there has been very little research that uses expatriate workers as its sample (Tsang, 2001; Huang et al., 2005; Kraimer et al., 2001). Moreover, the mediation of overseas adjustments with respect to social support and work performance has been tested and supported in this research, which provides further references for future research.

With respect to managerial implications, this study concludes that social support and overseas adjustments can enhance the work performance of expatriate workers. One of the most important resources to firms is the human resource (Becker and Gerhart, 1996).. Although expatriates may only work in Taiwan temporarily, the high technology firms at the export and process zone should assist their expatriate workers in seeking greater social support as this leads to better overseas adjustments and work performance. According to previous research as well as the current study, the better the overseas adjustments are, the better the work performance. Helping workers from overseas to adapt not only to local culture and customs, but also to local laws and regulations can relieve the possible insecurity of the expatriates, and assists them in adapting to a new environment. Moreover, it helps them to generate motivation to accomplish tasks, support co-workers and work towards the goals of their organizations. Through improved social support for, and overseas adjustments of, expatriates, enhanced work performance is achieved, which, in turn, improves the synergy of the management of firms.

Limitation and further research

Due to the constraints of manpower, funding and time, we acknowledge that there are some limitations in the present study that should be taken into consideration. First, as the participants were sampled hierarchically to represent the various nationalities of expatriate workers, the representation of samples could have been affected as we were compelled to ask the human resource departments of firms to distribute and collect questionnaires. This gave the researchers little control over the process. Secondly, due to language limitations, the creditability and validity of translated surveys was difficult to examine. The final limitation relates to the possibility of the presence of CMV, resulting from the self-reported nature of the survey data. This type of variance renders possible over- or under-estimation of the correlation among variables. Harman's single-factor post hoc analysis is adopted to test CMV; however, it is only a basic test. As a consequence, it is important to be aware of the possibility that CMV may still be present in the study results.

Further research's suggestions are: 1.) Inclusion of more constructs: Besides the social support and overseas

adjustments, there are other variables which may influence work performance. To develop a solid theoretical background, future studies might test more variables for further analysis. 2.) Adoption of different data sources: Different data sources, such as assessment from the brokers of expatriate workers, may offer more insight and different perspectives. In view of the use of self-administered questionnaires in this study, it is possible for some errors to have occurred due to the inflation effect. Moreover, we were not able to manage our samples according to the proportion of the nationality of the expatriates. In light of this, for future studies, different data sources and paired samples are suggested. 3.) The conducting of more studies on social support and overseas adjustments: The strong correlation between social support and overseas adjustments has been discussed by previous researchers and is also supported in this study. However, only little research has included these two variables, which may be a fruitful direction for future research to take.

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