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The intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children

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Author's Personal Experiences while Living in the Netherlands

I first came to Holland in September 1997 to complete my Master's degree. I did not do much in the way of preparations to adapt to the living in the Netherlands thinking that I would not face problems. In fact, I never thought much about adapting to a country that is different from my own. At that time, I had only one thing in my mind: to study and complete my degree. Goodness, was I wrong!

Prior to the move, I did not know much about the Netherlands. The image I had of the country was one filled with beautiful and colourful tulips, yellow wooden clogs, charming windmills, endless dikes, and mounds of cheese. I remember very well the first day that I stepped foot in the Netherlands. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and from Schiphol Airport, I took a two-and-half-hour train journey to Groningen after a 14-hour non-stop flight from Kuala Lumpur. Nobody was waiting for me, either at Schiphol or Groningen Central Station. Nobody told me that almost everything is closed on Sundays in Groningen, even the Guest House where I had made a reservation to stay for three nights. To think about it, I believe that was my first culture shock in the Netherlands! The taxi driver left me at the Guest House and there was a note at the door saying that newly arrived guests would have to call a security guard in order to get in. I left my two big suitcases unattended in front of the Guest House and tried to locate a telephone booth. Unfortunately, the only telephone booths available were card-operated. I asked at least five people who passed by if I could use their telephone cards. Strangely, nobody had a telephone card and one person told me to buy one at the Post Office, which is of course, also closed on Sundays. I was tired, hungry, and angry and at the same time I was worried about the luggage that I left in front of the Guest House! I just walked down the street until I saw a cafe and asked a kind young lady whether I could use the telephone in the cafe. Luckily, after leaving my luggage for 45 minutes unattended, they were still there. After the check-in, I was exhausted and took the longest nap in my life.

I woke up the next morning and hurried to the university, registered, and followed a class right away. Jet-legged, I spent the whole afternoon in bed and woke up at 6:30 pm just to find out that all the shops were already closed! Loneliness hit me right away and I felt trapped in my hotel room. Not knowing anyone in the city and how to move about in Groningen, I spent the whole night watching TV and eating the instant noodles that I brought from Malaysia.

In the following days and months, I started making friends at the university as well as at the hostel where I stayed. I was busy with assignments, books, and exams and I believe that I did not do much in order to adapt myself to the Netherlands as I spent a lot of time in the hostel room and also in the computer room studying and completing assignments. At the end of September the following year, I finished my Master's degree and returned to Malaysia.

(Continued in Chapter 9)

Chapter 1

Introduction and Problem Definition

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Expatriation

1.2 Involvement of the expatriate family members and the international company during the expatriation period

1.3 Main questions of the present thesis

1.4 The practical significance of the present thesis

1.5 Thesis outline

This chapter serves as an introduction to the topic of the present thesis. It starts with a few scenarios of expatriate spouse's and children's experiences while staying in the host country. Next, the factors that contribute to the success and failure of international business assignment are discussed. In addition, involvement of both expatriate family members and international company in the international business assignments are explained. The practical significance of this thesis and its purpose together with the outline conclude this chapter.

1.0 Introduction

Imagine that your partner comes home one night and tells you that he or she has been offered a posting by his/her company to the other end of the world. How would you feel? Would you be happy because your partner is advancing his/her career or would you become extremely worried about how difficult your life and your children's will be in a foreign country? The four scenarios below illustrate the experiences of expatriate spouses and children during their stay in a host country. Moreover, the four scenarios clearly depict how the situation in an expatriate family may affect the expatriate's work performance in a host country. The stories seem to be extreme examples but it is important to realize that they are true-life accounts.

Scenario 1

Two days after arriving at my post, I crumpled to the floor of my living room, screaming and crying to my husband that I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. He insisted that I calm down and get off the floor, that I pull myself together. After all, he said, the electrician, a man who would be taking care of us for the next two years, was waiting outside our house. Waiting to come in and fix some of the many problems we had found with our house in our first hours there. And it wouldn't do for him to find me in that state. I didn't care. Really. The problem wasn't the electricity, or the house, or jet leg. The problem wasn't my son, although when he asked for a glass of milk at dinner, I ran to bed, curled up in a fetal position, and cried. It wasn't the lack of a social group, though the expatriate community had deserted post last summer. It wasn't the move to a hot, dirty, dusty, unwelcoming, uncomfortable, high-risk, and high-differential post at the end of the world.

None of this mattered, and it all mattered terribly, as I fell into a deep depression within days of our arrival at our fourth overseas post.

In retrospect, I should have seen it coming. For months, when I had announced our posting to friends, they had asked me how I felt about it. I was okay with it; it was what my husband needed at this point in his career. Why would they ask such a question? I can only guess that my whole manner showed an unwillingness to move. Then I delayed getting ready for the pack-out and ended up shipping things that I could never use at post (ice skates in the tropics?) and storing things that I needed. I never did get my airfreight properly sorted, and I was shoving things at the packer as he was taping all the boxes shut.

I knew something was wrong before we boarded the plane, because I went out and bought two bottles of St. John's Wort, having read that it could help with mild depression. I knew I wasn't eating properly (I lost 10 pounds in a couple of weeks) and that I was anxious. But I was convinced it was the normal stress of moving and that I just kept going and got us to post — to our new home— everything would be fine. I could relax then, and everything would be fine. But it wasn't. Within days, I changed from Superwoman, capable of moving a family half way around the world without losing any luggage, into a person I did not know. A person who couldn't eat; who slept, yet never felt rested; who couldn't stop crying; who couldn't function well enough to take care of herself, much less the school-aged children who were her responsibility while her husband was off at work. Setting up a household, hiring help, learning how to get around—I had done it all before, but now, it might as well have been Mount Everest.

It was painful. It was scary. I knew something was very wrong and when I got the courage to talk to my husband about it, he admitted that he also knew. "This isn't me!" I said. We didn't know what to do about it, but I couldn't continue the way I was. To make things worse, I had no place to go. We had sold our house, our car, everything, in preparation for this tour. Finally, I knew that my husband would be deeply hurt if this, his career-enhancing assignment, was ruined because I couldn't handle it. It was hard for him to understand that I couldn't control what was happening. It was equally hard for me to understand. Later, I realized that behavior had caused stress and tension to my husband and he carried that to his work place. He couldn't concentrate and couldn't give his maximum productivity to his job. I pitied him. But it was too much though, and we agreed that even with the risk of curtailment, I had to make a call to the Regional Psychiatrist appointed by my husband's company.

"I need help!" were among my first, tearful words to the Regional Psychiatrist. He talked to me. He figured out what was wrong and prescribed drugs for me, drugs we've all heard of, but never thought of taking, and helped me get the drugs. We did not have to curtail.

Before I became depressed, I had only known one friend who was depressed. Later, I admitted my depression to her and two other friends. They were also treated for depression. Two were going through divorces and one had recently given birth, but all were as hurt and scared as I was. We shared our daily struggles, counseled one another when we felt down, and gave each other space when we needed it. One of the hardest

parts of depression for me was feeling so alone. But in fact, I found that I was not alone, even when setbacks made me pull inside again. Depression is still not socially acceptable. My depressed friends asked me not to tell mutual friends and I also fear that some might think less of me if they knew. Yet, I believe that persons around me must know; how could they ignore my mercurial moods of the last months?

Eight months have passed since I broke down. Many changes have happened since then: an evacuation, a return to post. I am still taking medication, more of it actually than I took in the first weeks after my diagnosis (that evacuation compounded the problem). And I expect to be taking medication for a good number of months more before we would consider lowering my dosages. I hope someday to be completely myself again. Most days now, I am happy and cheerful. I can talk and laugh like I used to. But I am still somewhat crippled. I must limit my outlook to the immediate future, or I get too anxious. I find myself able to enjoy time with my children, something I couldn't do for months because the smallest request from them would make me angry.

Had you asked me a year ago what the future would hold, this prolonged period of depression would not have been among the possibilities. Now I am not thinking so far in advance, but I am hoping that each day will be better than the one before. Some days are still hard. I wrote this to share my experience, as therapy, to help others and perhaps myself.

An excerpt and adaptation from Anonymous (1999).

Scenario 1 draws our attention to the experiences of an expatriate spouse who faced extreme difficulties with the relocation and transition process in a host country. Going abroad and living there for a certain period of time is a stressful experience. An expatriate spouse, either male or female, has to undergo major changes in life as a consequence of the relocation. The expatriate spouse, being unable to adapt, adjust, and cope with the life in the new place will feel depressed and disappointed. Expatriate children may also face difficulties in adjusting their lives in the host country. They are already facing important life changes while growing up and the adjustment to a host country will place an extra burden on them. What this burden leads to can be described in both scenario 2 and 3 below.

Scenario 2

The Michael Fay caning incident in Singapore in 1994. The boy was attending the American School in Singapore, pleaded guilty to spray painting cars and possessing stolen street signs. He was fined \$2,200 and sentenced to 4 months in prison, plus 6 strokes on his bare buttock with a four-foot, half-inch-thick rattan cane. His father was CEO of an automotive—supply company in Ohio and the boy was accompanying his mother and stepfather—an executive working for a US multinational company in Singapore. Fay's indiscretion caused not just mere humiliation, it created an international incident. Obviously, the family had to face the media, was subjected to public scrutiny, incurred legal costs and had to endure the agony of their son's incarceration in a Singapore jail. Certainly no company wants to be associated with such a fiasco.

Scenario 3

Oneteenage boy in Hong Kong attended a party where his father was entertaining major clients, the group was congratulating each other on the fine job they'd recently completed and what a good attorney the father was when the boy screamed, "You may think he is a good person, but he's not. He's terrible and he's ruining our family." The effect: major loss of the credibility for the father and complete embarrassment for the law firm.

Both scenarios 2 and 3 are excerpts from Solomon (1996).

If expatriate spouses and children are facing adjustment problems in a host country, this will undoubtedly affect the expatriates themselves. Scenario 4 gives us a good illustration.

Scenario 4

A major U.S. food manufacturer was seeking someone from corporate staff to head its Japanese marketing division. Mr. X was selected because he was clearly one of the company's bright young talents; he had also demonstrated superior marketing skills in the home office. Those making the appointment did not assess his ability to relate to working with Japanese because it was assumed that a good manager in the United States would be a good manager abroad. Prior to his 18-month assignment, Mr. X was given some literature pertaining to Japan's geography, climate, banking and educational institutions and was asked to share these material with his family.

However, during the initial 6 months in Japan, Mr. X was unable to devote much time to company activities because he was preoccupied with problems he and his family were having in adapting to the new environmental setting. His wife kept on asking him when they were going home since they were not enjoying themselves there. The result: in the course of Mr. X's 18-month assignment to Japan, his company lost 98% of its existing market share to a major European competitor, not to mention how much money the company had spent on him and his family to move to Japan and relocate to the U.S.

An excerpt and adaptation from Tung (1987).

Scenario 4 shows that problems at home and feelings of guilt about the burden of their decision on the family relocation may affect the expatriates' work negatively and may even make them to decide to return home earlier. This situation not only has a negative impact on the expatriate and his/her family members but also on the company that often has invested a large amount of money in the assignment.

The four scenarios above literally show the importance of the roles of expatriate spouses and children in the expatriates' ability to carry out the international business assignments successfully. Therefore, it seems important to get insight into the lives of expatriate spouses and children and to study factors that may contribute to their adaptation. The present research is an inquiry into the determinants of expatriate spouses' and children's inter-cultural adaptation and at the same time a study of the relationship between expatriates' work life in a host country and expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation. We would argue that there are many determinants that contribute to expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation and the main objective of the present thesis is to uncover a few of them.

1.1 Expatriation

Expatriate in Latin means out of the fatherland/mother country (ex + patria) while modern dictionaries give a few definitions of an "expatriate". According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978), an expatriate is "a person living in a foreign country". Meanwhile, according to the English-Reader's Dictionary (1979) an expatriate is "a person living away from his own country".

Scholars also have tried to give definitions of the concept. For example, Adler (1991) defined an expatriate as an employee who is sent by the company to live and work in a foreign country. In his book, Modern Management (1997, p. 88), Certo defined expatriates as “organization members who live and work in a country where they do not have citizenship”. An expatriate assignment has been defined as “a job transfer that takes the employee to a workplace that is outside the country in which he or she is a citizen. Expatriate assignments are longer in duration than other types of international assignments (e.g. business trips), and require the employee to move his or her entire household to the foreign location. Thus, in an expatriate assignment, the employee’s home base of business operations is in the foreign country.” (The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management, 1997, p. 109).

In the present thesis, we follow the definition of an expatriate given by The Blackwell Encyclopedia Management (1997) above. In the context of this thesis, we will focus on expatriate spouses (both males and females) and children who join the expatriates to live in the host country.

1.1.1 Motives of expatriation

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) send expatriates to carry out international business assignments for several reasons. Black and Gregersen (1999), and Halcrow (1999) have listed a number of reasons:

- To open new markets
- To facilitate a merger or acquisition
- To set up new technologies and systems
- To enlarge market share and fight competitors from getting market share
- To develop long term business view in the foreign countries
- To transfer knowledge to local professionals and to learn from them too
- To generate innovative ideas
- To develop global leadership skills/leaders.

Over the years, the number of expatriates has increased. A clear example is Shell International whose main headquarters is in The Hague, the Netherlands, which has the highest number of expatriates in the world. The number of expatriates rose from 5508 in May 1997 (Destinations, 1997) to 5700 in July 1998. The Global Relocation Trends

Survey by Windham International and National Foreign Trade Council in 1994 reported that the number of American expatriates sent all over the world was increasing (Flynn, 1995). The average number of expatriates all over the world rose 30% in 1994 and China was the country that showed the highest five-year increase (1360%). As more companies expand globally and more international business assignments are involved, more and more expatriates will be sent all over the world.

There are a lot of obstacles to deal with when a company goes international, such as political system, economic situation and labor laws. Besides dealing with a whole array of differences, the company has to choose reliable people who possess crucial company knowledge as well as the skills to carry out the company's international business assignments. Usually, in the selection of expatriates, strong emphasis is placed on job skills and experiences needed to perform the technical aspects of the job. An issue that is often overlooked is whether the expatriates who are sent to the new locations are capable of adjusting to the context of a different cultural environment. And even less attention is paid to other aspects such as the well-being of their families.

International business assignments are important to the success of the MNCs because they help to build the level of global competence and global integration within the organization (Caligiuri, Hyland and Joshi, 1998). However, expatriate failure rates are high. In the following paragraphs we will discuss reasons for expatriate failure. Subsequently, we will discuss criteria for successful fulfillment of an overseas assignment.

1.1.2 The success and failure of the expatriate international business assignment

1.1.2.1 Expatriate failure

A recent study by Black and Gregersen (1999) showed that 10% to 20% of all U.S. managers sent abroad returned early because of job dissatisfaction or difficulties in adjusting to a foreign country. Of those who did complete the assignment, nearly one-third did not perform up to the expectations of their superiors. A study performed in the United Kingdom by Forster (1997) revealed that an average of 8% of expatriate employees return home before the agreed end of the assignment. When the definition of expatriate failure was broadened to include the negative effects, stresses, and strains of an international assignment on expatriates and their families, failure rate raised up to 28% — an alarmingly high

failure rate of the international business assignments that the MNCs should be aware of. Such failures often constitute a heavy personal blow to the expatriates' self-esteem and ego. The "failed" expatriates may take some time before they regain confidence in their own abilities. The unsettling experience for the person's family, both emotionally and physically, represents yet another consequence (Tung, 1987).

There is no need to argue that failure of international business assignments has negative financial consequences. It is estimated that the direct shipping costs alone can exceed US\$ 100,000 for a failed assignment (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992, p. 11). A study by Black and Gregersen (1992) revealed that the total cost to multinational corporations (MNCs) of premature returns is approximately US\$ 2 billion per year. These costs are the direct costs. The indirect costs could be equally damaging to both companies and individuals. Failed international business assignments may vary in degree (Shaffer and Harrison, 1998). Expatriates who remain on the assignment but psychologically withdraw may also incur indirect losses for their companies, including reduced productivity, market share and competitive position, as well as distorted staff, customer and supplier relations and discredited corporate image and reputation (Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall, 1992). Naumann (1992) argued that the indirect costs of a failed international business assignment may include reduced productivity and efficiencies, lost sales, market share and competitive position, an unstable corporate image and damage to international networks. Tung (1988) added that withdrawal from international assignments can also be costly for expatriates and their families, in terms of diminished self-esteem, impaired relationships, and interrupted careers. Because of the undesirable financial and psychological costs associated with high failure rates of expatriate assignments, it is important to examine the factors associated with successful expatriation.

What causes these high failure rates? Personality attributes such as the inability to deal with stressful situations, lack of right attitudes and skills to communicate with people from different cultures, and the inadaptability of the family to the new environment are frequently cited as reasons that cause an expatriate manager to return prematurely from the international business assignment (Mendenhall, Dunbar, and Oddou, 1987; Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall, 1992).

Tung (1987) identifies seven reasons for expatriate failure. Note that two of these reasons are clearly family-related. Table 1.1 illustrates the reasons in descending order of importance.

Table 1.1
Reasons for an expatriate's failure

Number	Reasons
1	Inability of the manager's spouse to adjust to a different physical or cultural environment
2	The manager's inability to adapt to a different physical or cultural environment
3	Other family-related problems
4	The manager's personality or emotional immaturity
5	The manager's inability to cope with the responsibilities posed by overseas work
6	The manager's lack of technical competence
7	The manager's lack of motivation to work overseas.

Source: Tung (1987)

1.1.2.2 Expatriate success

Kelly and Ruben (1983) have defined a successful expatriate as a person who has the ability to live and work effectively in an overseas environment. Scholars have devised different ways to evaluate an individual's success in an expatriate assignment. The three most common indicators used to evaluate success are (see for example Caligiuri, 1996):

- The completion of the foreign assignment
- Cross-cultural adjustment
- Actual performance on the foreign assignment

Examining the above indicators, it seems clear that successful fulfillment of the international business assignments requires not only managerial and technical skills but also effective adjustment to the new cultural environment. Companies tend to regard managerial talent and technical expertise as the most important criteria when choosing expatriate candidates to carry out the international business assignment. Not much attention is devoted to traits and abilities associated with successful cultural adjustment (Tung, 1988). In a study by Black and

Gregersen (1999), it was found that, in general, MNCs emphasize the following characteristics in their expatriates:

- Drive to communicate
- Broad-based sociability
- Cultural flexibility
- Cosmopolitan orientation
- A collaborative negotiation style.

According to Black and Gregersen (1999), companies that manage their expatriates successfully tend to focus on creating knowledge and developing global leadership skills and to ensure that candidates have cross-cultural skills to match their technical abilities. Interestingly, the Global Relocation Trends Survey by Windham International and National Foreign Trade Council in 1994 revealed that with respect to the criteria that are most valued in an expatriate in a global management position, professional skills ranked in importance after flexibility and having an international perspective. Flynn (1995) interviewed 72 Human Resource Managers of multinational companies who were responsible for selecting candidates for international business assignments and identified a number of key criteria for a successful expatriate (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2
Key criteria for a successful expatriate

Key criteria for a successful expatriate	Percentage
1. Cross-cultural adaptability	35%
2. Job, technical, and management skills	22.2%
3. Family stability and adaptability	16.2%
4. Good job/role planning and support	5.4%
5. Assignee enthusiasm	3.1%
6. Social and interpersonal skills	3.1%
7. Adequacy of compensation package	1.8%
8. Language skills	1.8%
9. Assignee spirit of adventure and willingness to take risks	1.8%
10. Communication skills	1.2%

Source: Flynn (1995)

Seven of these criteria have to do with the expatriates themselves: cross-cultural adaptability; job, technical and management skills; assignee enthusiasm; social and interpersonal skills; language skills; assignee spirit of adventure and willingness to take risks, and communication skills.

1.2 Involvement of expatriate spouses and children during the expatriation period

1.2.1 Expatriate spouses' and children's involvement

The previous paragraphs showed that some of the reasons for expatriate failure and the criteria for success are family-related, which demonstrates that expatriate family members' adaptation in the host country is of critical importance (Flynn, 1995; Tung, 1987). Other studies have also stressed the importance of cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate's family members to successful completion of the expatriate assignment (e.g., Yurkiewics and Rozen, 1995; A. Rahim, 1993). Fukuda and Chu (1994) revealed that family-related problems are regarded by Japanese and American firms as a very important contributing factor of an expatriate's failure. Punnet (1997) also reported cases of husbands of transferred women executives who found living in the host country so stressful that it led to the break-up of their marriages. An overseas assignment is a change that requires the expatriate and the family members to restructure, develop, and adapt to the new and different environment in a host country. Although several authors stressed the importance of family factors for overseas success, there is little research on family issues that are related to expatriates' success or failure. The assumption of the present research is that the success of the international business assignment is not only a function of the expatriate himself or herself but also a function of the trailing expatriate spouse and children. The success of the assignment is determined by the adaptation of the expatriate to the new living conditions, which, in turn, largely depends on the adaptation of expatriate spouses and children to an unfamiliar lifestyle in a foreign country (De Leon and McPartlin, 1995).

In many ways, the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate spouse and children is more difficult than the adjustment that an expatriate faces (Naumann, 1992). The expatriate has to change his physical location, yet stays within the stability of the familiar organizational culture, which largely reflects the home country. The expatriate finds continuity in his work life, as well as a network of colleagues for support. For a large part

of the day, during most of week, the expatriate does not come into direct contact with the host culture (Harvey, 1985). The expatriate spouse and children, on the other hand, have no access to organizational continuity, mainly experiencing disruption of their personal lives. Furthermore, they get very little help in coping with the daily demands of unfamiliar circumstances (De Leon and Mc Partlin, 1995).

Distress among expatriate spouses and children in a host country may affect the well-being of expatriates in a negative way, and this may in turn have a negative impact on their work outcomes (Solomon, 1996). Since about 80% of the international expatriates around the world are married and more than 70% have children with them during the assignments (Black, Gregersen, and Wethli, 1990), it is important that strategic international human resource management systems take the family factor into account (Oddou and Mendenhall, 1991). Therefore, it is relevant to conduct empirical studies on factors that influence effective adjustment among expatriate family members.

1.2.2 The international company's involvement in expatriation

The policy of the international company that sends the expatriate to a host country also may affect the expatriate's success in performing their international business assignments. In their study, Guzzo, Noonan, and Elron (1994) asked expatriates to rate 43 company practices in terms of how much support was provided to them and their family members. The 43 company practices included financial inducements such as tax equalization, currency protection and completion bonus; general support such as home leave, club membership and use of company-owned vacation facilities; and family-oriented support such as language courses, assistance in locating schools for children and assistance in locating employment for the spouses. The authors used scores on a 5-point scale to reflect how much assistance the company provided. The results (median) were: financial support (2.76), general support (2.3), and family support (1.69), which showed that companies gave less assistance to expatriate spouses and children.

Some companies do engage in serious efforts to make foreign assignments beneficial for both the employees and the organization. Such companies consign the responsibility of expatriate selection, training, and support to the human resource department (Black and Gregersen, 1999). However, the selection is sometimes performed without considering the ability of the expatriate candidates and their families to adapt and adjust and function effectively in a new cultural

environment (Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall, 1992, p. 55). The Human Resource Department role is not only limited to selecting the expatriate candidates but also providing cross-cultural training, as well as the administration of psychological tests for expatriates and their family members (Mendenhall, Dunbar, and Oddou, 1987).

MNCs that are aware of the importance of the expatriate spouses would never leave this group unattended while setting up and updating their international human resource policies. Realizing that the adjustment of the trailing spouses is as important as the expatriates themselves, most of the MNCs try to do their best to assist them. One interesting study that should be noted is that by De Cieri, Dowling, and Taylor (1991). They found that the most important positive predictor of psychological adjustment of the expatriate spouses is company assistance. Unfortunately, they are not very specific about the nature and amount of support that is needed by the expatriate spouses in order for them to adjust and adapt to the different and new situations in the host country.

1.3 Main Questions of the Present Thesis

The present thesis deals with the inter-cultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children within the expatriation period. In order to find out the determinants of the intercultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children, a few main questions are to be answered:

- How do personality characteristics of expatriate spouses and children contribute to their intercultural adaptation in the host country?
- What are the impact of expatriate family characteristics on the intercultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children?
- How do attachment styles of expatriate children contribute to their intercultural adaptation in the host country?
- To what extent does the intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children relate to the expatriates' work characteristics?
- How do other significant factors (examples, duration of expatriation, command of local language, a visit to the host country prior the relocation, and etc.) contribute to expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation?

Table 1.3 illustrates in depth the main questions posed by the present thesis.

Table 1.3
Main questions of the present thesis

Main questions	Sources to answer the question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relationship between personality characteristics and intercultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children in a host country? The personality characteristics that we will discuss in the present thesis are cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility. 	Literature review and empirical study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relationship between family characteristics (cohesion, adaptability, and communication) and intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and children in a host country? 	Literature review and empirical study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do attachment styles of expatriate children contribute to their intercultural adaptation in the host country? The attachment styles that we will discuss in the present thesis are Secure Attachment Style, Dismissive-avoidant Attachment Style, Preoccupied Attachment Style, and Fearful-avoidant Attachment Style. 	Literature review and empirical study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the relationships between expatriates' work characteristics (in terms of support from the company and expatriates' work satisfaction) and inter-cultural adaptation of expatriate spouses and children? 	Literature review and empirical study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do other significant factors (examples, duration of expatriation, command of local language, a visit to the host country prior the relocation, and etc.) contribute to expatriate spouses' and children's intercultural adaptation? 	Literature review and empirical study

1.4 The practical significance of the present thesis

The present study will integrate family, culture adaptation, and management perspectives at the same time. The findings from the present research may benefit international companies that send staff and their family members to a foreign posting, present and future expatriates, expatriate spouses and children, and last but not least the academic world.

The results of this study will provide ideas and practical suggestions, which international companies can implement to improve their expatriation programs and policies. It is not only the expatriates' adaptation and adjustment that are important to the success of international business assignments but also the inter-cultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children. In order to prevent the failure of the international business assignments, the multinational companies may pay adequate attention to the issues of the expatriate family members. We also hope that present and future expatriates will make use of the results of the present thesis for a better understanding about the process that their spouses and children go through while adapting and adjusting to a host country. In addition, we hope that the results of the present research will benefit present and future expatriate spouses and children. The results of the present study identify the personality characteristics, which place expatriate spouses and children at risk, i.e., those who need extra support and attention during the transition stage. Moreover, at the family level, interventions may be based on those family characteristics that contribute to intercultural adaptation in the host country.

In addition, the present research aims at filling gaps in the body of literature concerning the issue of the inter-cultural adaptation and adjustment of expatriate spouses and children. Scientific literature on expatriate spouses and children is scarce and often based on indirect feedback obtained from the expatriates or from the companies, an approach that could create bias in the end results. Expatriate spouses, expatriate children, and expatriates themselves were directly and actively involved as informants and respondents to the present study so as to reduce bias in the information-gathering process about their intercultural adaptation in a host country.

To summarize this chapter, Table 1.4 recapitulates the key terms of this chapter.

Table 1.4
Key concepts of Chapter 1

Key concept	Explanation
International business assignment	One in which the company sends an employee for an assignment to a foreign country for a certain period of time.*
Expatriate	An employee who is sent by the company to live and work in a foreign country.*
Expatriate spouse or trailing expatriate spouse	The partner of the expatriate who is following his/her other partner/spouse for the international business assignment.
Expatriate children or trailing expatriate children	The children of the expatriate who are following their parent/parents for the international business assignment.
Host country	The country that the expatriate and his/her family are sent to.* The country in which a foreigner resides.**
Home country	The expatriate and his/her family's country of citizenship.*

Note:

*derived from Adler, N. (1991)

**based on National Network of Foreign Spouses — Taiwan 2001,
<http://www.tainan.com/nnfs/>

1.5 Thesis Outline

The present thesis is organized as follows:

- In chapter two, we discuss the importance of expatriate spouses and children to the success of international business assignment.

- Chapter three deals with the adaptation process among expatriate spouses and children.
- In chapter four, we present the theoretical model and hypotheses of the present thesis.
- Chapter five deals with the empirical results and discussion of the study on the determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate spouses and a discussion on the longitudinal study on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation.
- Chapter six discuss the relationships between expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation and Hofstede's four cultural dimensions.
- In chapter seven, the results of the study of Work-Home Interference and Home-Work Interference of both expatriates and their spouses on expatriate spouses' intercultural adaptation are presented.
- Chapter eight deals with the empirical results and discussion of the study on the determinants of intercultural adaptation among expatriate children.
- Finally chapter nine presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendation of the present study.