

Would you teach in Thailand? The relationship between perceived social support, motivational cultural intelligence, cognitive cultural intelligence, and expatriates' willingness among mandarin teachers expatriated from Mainland China

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Abstract: Drawing on Conservation of Resources theory and the Job Demands-Resources model, this study investigates the influence of perceived social support (PSS) on expatriation willingness (EW) among 394 Chinese university Mandarin teachers, and examines the moderating effects of motivational (MCQ) and cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ). Hypotheses are tested with SPSS 25 and Mplus. Results indicate that PSS from coworkers ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = .002$) and leaders ($\beta = 0.205$, $p = .001$) significantly positively predict EW. However, neither MCQ ($\beta = -0.047$, $p = 0.595$) nor CCQ ($\beta = 0.031$, $p = 0.635$) moderates the overall PSS–EW relationship. A notable exception is the significant negative moderating effect of CCQ ($\beta = -0.109$, $p = .001$) on the link between PSSC and EW. These findings highlight the complex interplay between social and cultural resources in shaping cross-cultural teaching intentions, offering practical implications for support design and talent recruitment in international educational contexts.

Keywords: *Conservation of resources theory, Cross-cultural adjustment, Cultural intelligence, Expatriation willingness, Mandarin teachers, Perceived social support.*

1. Introduction

With China's expanding influence in the global economy, understanding the adaptation of Chinese expatriates has become increasingly important. Existing research highlights that organizational support and local social support significantly influence their willingness to undertake international assignments [1]. This is particularly relevant against the backdrop of the growing worldwide demand for Chinese language education and China's active promotion of its linguistic and cultural heritage. These factors have contributed to a substantial rise in the number of Mandarin teachers dispatched abroad, including to Thailand. As of December 2023, Chinese language programs have been established in over 180 countries and regions [2]. In 2019 alone, approximately 3,200 Chinese teachers were serving overseas, supplemented by an additional 1,000 newly appointed teachers and nearly 7,000 volunteers [3]. This rapid expansion underscores the need to closely examine the experiences and challenges faced by these teachers.

The promotion of Chinese language education has been especially pronounced in Thailand, where cultural intelligence (CQ) has been recognized as a critical factor in expatriate success [1]. In response, numerous universities have established Chinese studies departments, reinforcing the importance of cross-cultural competence in a globalized educational landscape. Enhancing intercultural communication not only improves the quality of Chinese language instruction but also contributes to the development of effective teacher management strategies, particularly within Sino-Thai contexts [4]. However, significant cultural and stylistic differences between China and Thailand may pose challenges

for expatriate teachers. Guang and Charoensukmongkol [5] observe that failure to understand or adapt to local cultural norms can lead to perceptions of ineffective leadership. Thus, both cultural intelligence and perceived organizational support are essential in shaping the willingness of Mandarin teachers to accept overseas assignments. Moreover, Zheng, et al. [6] report that nearly one-third of Chinese volunteer teachers experience psychological distress, often stemming from difficulties in cultural adaptation. Those with higher levels of motivational and cognitive cultural intelligence appear better able to navigate cross-cultural discrepancies and demonstrate greater adaptability.

Despite these insights, few studies have specifically investigated the joint influence of perceived social support from both colleagues and supervisors and cultural intelligence on teachers' willingness to work internationally [1, 7]. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to the unique context of Mandarin teachers in Thailand, especially concerning the role of social support in mitigating the reality shock often encountered in unfamiliar academic and social environments [8]. To address these gaps, this study examines how perceived social support and cultural intelligence collectively influence Mainland Chinese Mandarin teachers' willingness to undertake expatriate assignments in Thailand. Incorporating control variables such as prior overseas experience and language proficiency, this research aims to provide practical insights for both sending and host institutions seeking to improve the recruitment, training, and support of Chinese expatriate teachers.

1.1. Research Objectives

The study aims to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and expatriation willingness, with particular emphasis on the moderating effects of cultural intelligence dimensions. The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the positive influence of overall perceived social support on expatriates' willingness.
2. To compare the relative impact of three specific sources of social support, supervisor support, family support, and colleague support, on expatriation willingness, in order to identify the most influential factor.
3. To investigate the moderating role of Motivational Cultural Intelligence in enhancing the positive relationship between perceived social support and expatriation willingness.
4. To examine the moderating role of Behavioral Cultural Intelligence in strengthening the positive relationship between perceived social support and expatriation willingness.
5. To explore how these relationships contribute to expatriates' willingness to engage in local cultural immersion and adapt to the host country's educational system.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conservation of Resources (COR) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

This study draws on two complementary theories: Conservation of Resources (COR) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R). COR theory posits that individuals seek to obtain and protect resources, with stress arising from potential or actual loss [9]. Within the context of expatriation, cultural intelligence functions as a critical personal resource that mitigates perceived uncertainty and facilitates adaptive responses, thereby promoting expatriation willingness. Simultaneously, the JD-R model [10] categorizes occupational conditions into job demands and job resources. In this framework, perceived social support (PSS) from both supervisors, colleagues, and family constitutes a vital social resource that not only attenuates the adverse effects of job demands but also stimulates motivational processes. Collectively, these theories provide an integrative explanatory mechanism whereby personal resources (e.g., cultural intelligence) and social resources (e.g., PSS) interact to shape individuals' willingness to undertake international assignments.

2.1.1. *Perceived Social Support (PSS)*

Based on the definition of Zimet, et al. [11] and Sokro and Pillay [12], this study defines perceived social support (PSS) as Mandarin teachers' overall subjective perception and experience of emotional support from family, coworkers, and leaders.

2.1.2. *Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*

Drawing on the conceptualization by Ang and Van Dyne [13], this study operationalizes cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ) as an individual's acquired understanding of the norms, economic frameworks, legal structures, and social systems derived from cross-cultural interactions. Similarly, motivational cultural intelligence (MCQ) is defined as the capacity to direct and sustain cognitive attention, emotional energy, and intentional effort toward intercultural encounters.

2.1.3. *Expatriation Willingness (EW)*

Drawing on the conceptualization advanced by Chou et al. [7], willingness for expatriation to Thailand is defined as an individual's psychological readiness and behavioral inclination to accept an institutionally facilitated international assignment, specifically a placement coordinated by a university or academic department requiring residence and professional engagement in Thailand for a predetermined duration.

2.1.4. *Perceived social support, Expatriation willingness, and Cultural Intelligence*

Existing scholarly work unequivocally establishes social support as a fundamental resource in expatriation contexts. Empirical evidence robustly indicates a positive association between well-developed support structures and elevated levels of work engagement [12, 13]. Beyond its individual-level effects, social support operates as a critical mechanism shaping collective outcomes, notably by enhancing team dynamics in multinational settings. Findings from Gao, et al. [14] illustrate that such support strengthens team adaptive capabilities and reduces premature repatriation through the cultivation of relational cohesion. The utility of social support is furthermore moderated by its origin and the degree of reciprocity inherent in the exchange process. For example, favourable perceptions among host-country nationals (HCNs) regarding support extended by expatriates correlate positively with the former's collaborative intent, thereby instigating a reinforcing cycle of mutual assistance, Sokro and Pillay [15]. Chanveasna, et al. [16] empirically established that social support directly enhances both cross-cultural adaptation and job performance among Chinese expatriates in Cambodia. Integrating this finding, this study proposes that perceived social support from family, coworkers, and leaders serves as a pivotal antecedent to expatriation willingness in culturally distant contexts. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Perceived social support has a positive impact on expatriation willingness.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): Perceived social support from coworkers has a positive impact on expatriation willingness.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): Perceived social support from leaders has a positive impact on expatriation willingness.

Hypothesis 1c (H1c): Perceived social support from family has a positive impact on expatriation willingness.

Individuals with high cognitive CQ exhibit greater acuity in identifying cultural commonalities, differences, and subtle interpersonal patterns [17], contributing to stronger interpersonal relationships and team cohesion [18]. Complementing this, Tabachnick, et al. [19] confirm that all CQ dimensions positively correlate with cross-cultural adjustment, with motivational CQ having the strongest effect. Zheng, et al. [6] further note that motivational CQ enhances role clarity, particularly boosting job satisfaction among Chinese self-initiated expatriates compared to British counterparts.

Building on this foundation, we argue that individuals with higher cognitive CQ perceive stronger social support, thereby increasing their willingness to undertake international assignments. In specific

professional contexts, particularly those emphasizing hierarchical or collegial networks, support from colleagues and supervisors may outweigh familial support in influencing expatriation decisions. We thus propose that Chinese educators with elevated cognitive and motivational CQ, along with perceived social support (especially from coworkers), demonstrate a stronger willingness to accept teaching assignments in Thailand. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Motivational CQ (MCQ) positively moderates the relationship between PSS and expatriation willingness.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Cognitive CQ (CCQ) positively moderates the relationship between PSS and expatriation willingness.

Wang, et al. [20] identify that prior international experience, language proficiency, cultural intelligence, personality traits, and career support are positively correlated with employees' willingness to undertake expatriate assignments. Building on empirical evidence linking motivational and cognitive CQ to expatriation willingness [7] and HCN coworker support as a mediator between CQ and burnout [21], this study proposes that cognitive CQ amplifies the effect of perceived social support from coworkers (PSS-coworker) on expatriation willingness. Specifically, individuals high in cognitive CQ more effectively interpret supportive behaviors and social cues in intercultural contexts, enhancing their confidence and motivation to undertake international assignments. Based on classic cross-cultural literature, expatriate adjustment is commonly defined as a state of psychological comfort [22]. Building on this foundation, this study proposes that individuals with higher levels of coworker support and greater metacognitive cultural intelligence are more likely to exhibit a stronger willingness to accept expatriate assignments. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Cognitive Cultural Intelligence positively moderates the relationship between PSS-coworker and expatriation willingness.

The research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Conceptual framework

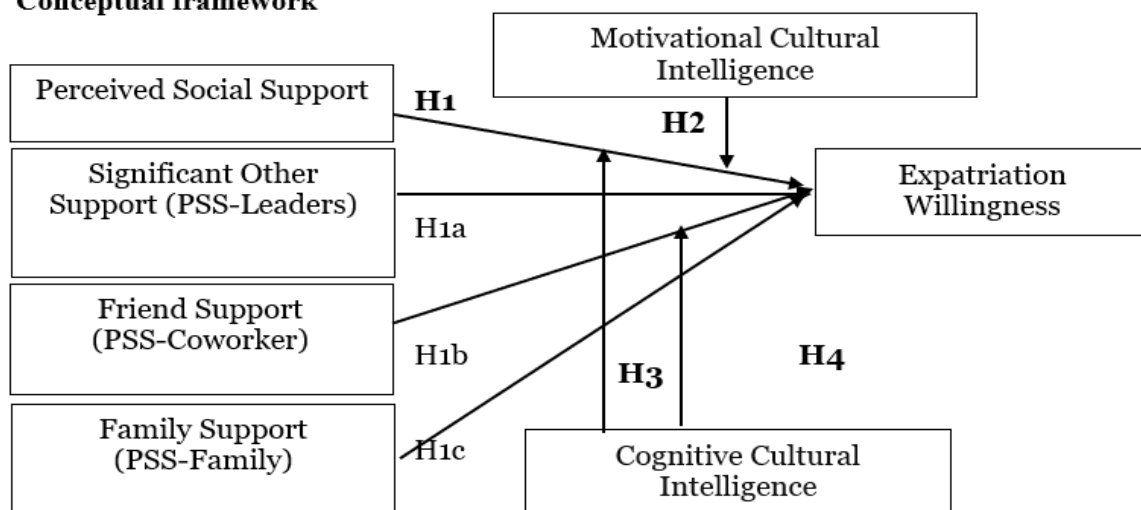


Figure 1.
Theoretical Framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population and Samples

This study targeted Chinese language faculty members employed at major universities in Yunnan Province, China. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, informed by the researchers' familiarity with the academic environment and the characteristics of the target population, particularly in relation

to expatriate teaching contexts. Yunnan Province was selected due to its growing engagement with international academic exchange and its strategic relevance to the study's focus on expatriation willingness. This sampling approach ensured that participants possessed the necessary academic background and cultural context aligned with the research objectives. To be eligible, participants were required to: (1) hold a full-time academic position; (2) be actively teaching in a Chinese language department; and (3) be currently employed at a university located in Yunnan Province. These inclusion criteria ensured the relevance and consistency of the sample with the research objectives.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire. A total of 400 responses were received. After rigorous screening to remove incomplete, duplicate, and inconsistent entries, 394 valid responses were retained for analysis, resulting in a high valid response rate of 98.5%.

3.2. Questionnaire Design and Measurements

All measurement instruments were adapted from established scales, translated into Traditional Chinese, and refined for contextual appropriateness. The questionnaire comprised the following components:

Perceived Social Support (PSS): Support sources included supervisors, co-workers and family (12 items), developed by Zimet, et al. [11].

Expatriation Willingness: Assessed using an 11-item scale developed by Chou, et al. [7] adapted to reference "Thailand" as the host country.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ): Measured via an 11-item scale based on Ang et al. [23], translated and validated by Chou et al. [7], encompassing two dimensions: Cognitive CQ (5 items) and Motivational CQ (6 items).

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Reliability analysis indicated strong internal consistency across all scales, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.70 to 0.95.

3.3. Implementation Procedure

This study received formal ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Dhurakij Pundit University (Approval No.: COA004/67; Project ID: DPUHREC023/66EX) prior to the commencement of any data collection. Given the involvement of human participants in survey-based research, a comprehensive ethical review was undertaken to ensure compliance with internationally recognized standards for the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. In adherence to institutional ethical standards and IRB-approved protocols, all institutional identifiers were fully anonymized to protect participant confidentiality and ensure compliance with research integrity requirements. Participants received a digital survey package that included a questionnaire link, a QR code for access, and an informed consent statement. Data collection was initiated only after IRB clearance had been obtained and was conducted between August and December 2024.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.0 and Mplus. Descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing were performed in SPSS to examine the relationships among variables. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out using Mplus to assess the measurement model's construct validity and model fit. Model fit was evaluated using standard indices, including χ^2 , CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Information of Respondents

A total of 394 respondents participated in the study, with 48.73% identified as male (192 individuals) and 51.27% as female (202 individuals). In terms of age distribution, the largest groups were those aged

20–25 years (32.23%) and 31–35 years (32.23%), followed by 26–30 years (25.63%), 36–40 years (9.14%), and over 40 years (0.76%). Regarding the length of overseas stay, the majority had been abroad for less than one year (42.13%), followed by 1–2 years (27.92%), 3–5 years (22.34%), and more than 5 years (7.62%). As for Thai language proficiency, most respondents rated their skills as moderate (31.47%), while 29.19% rated them as very poor, 27.16% as poor, 10.66% as good, and only 1.52% as very good.

4.2. Data Analysis

4.2.1. Reliability Analysis

After validation, the Cronbach [23] alpha values for the variables in this study ranged from 0.700 to 0.950, indicating a high level of internal consistency [23]. The corrected item-total correlation (CITC) coefficients for all items were greater than 0.4, and the Cronbach's alpha values if items were deleted were all lower than the overall Cronbach's alpha values. This suggests that removing any item would not improve the reliability of the scale, further supporting the internal consistency of the measurement.

4.2.2. Validity Analysis

The analysis of validity was conducted by examining both convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity can be established through three primary criteria: first, all standardized factor loadings should exceed 0.5; second, the composite reliability (CR) should be greater than 0.6; and third, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be above 0.5.

Table 1 shows that the Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs ranged from 0.751 to 0.956 (greater than 0.7). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.505 to 0.854 (greater than 0.5), which demonstrates strong convergent validity. Furthermore, the square roots of the AVE for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficients, providing evidence of adequate discriminant validity.

Table 1.

The Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Distinguishing and Convergent Validity, Correlation Analysis Table.

Variables	AVE	CR	Pearson correlation and the square root of AVE					
			CCQ	MCQ	PSSL	PSSC	PSSF	EW
CCQ	0.685	0.897	0.828					
MCQ	0.814	0.956	0.035	0.902				
PSSL	0.505	0.751	0.255*	0.198*	0.711			
PSSC	0.854	0.959	0.213*	0.092	0.042	0.924		
PSSF	0.790	0.883	-0.022	0.093	0.014	0.138*	0.889	
EW	0.620	0.942	0.176*	0.020	0.151*	0.195*	0.019	0.780

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01; Bolded values are the arithmetic square root of AVE; Sources are compiled for this study.

To examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. The model fit indices and their corresponding values are as follows: The chi-square (χ^2) value is 1081.036 with 362 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0. The chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) is 2.986, which is below the recommended threshold of 3 [24]. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 0.921, and the TLI is 0.911, both exceeding the desired threshold of 0.9 [25]. Overall, suggesting that the validity of the items met the criteria, and there was good convergent validity.

Table 2.

Model Fit Indicators.

Indicators	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Criteria	-	-	<3	<0.8	<0.10	>0.9	>0.9
Value	1081.036	362	2.986	0.040	0.078	0.921	0.911

Table 1: The hypotheses were tested using MPLUS. Following the criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler [26] for evaluating model fit $\chi^2/df < 3$, TLI > 0.90 , CFI > 0.90 , RMSEA < 0.08 , and SRMR < 0.08 the data demonstrated a good fit to the measurement model.

4.2.3. Analysis of Empirical Results on Direct Effects

This study conducted regression analysis using SPSS and adopted a 95% confidence interval (CI) to evaluate the statistical significance of the results.

As seen in Table 1, to examine this study's objective 1, the positive influence of overall perceived social support on expatriates' willingness to undertake international assignments is analyzed. The regression coefficient value of PSS is 0.152 ($p=0.000<0.01$), which demonstrates that Perceived Social Support (PSS) has a significant positive impact on EX. H1 is supported.

Table 3.

Results of Linear Regression Analysis: Perceived Social Support Predicting Expatriation Willingness.

Variables	Coefficient (β)	t-value	95% Confidence Interval	VIF	Tolerance
Gender	0.064	1.088	-0.051 ~ 0.179	1.407	0.711
Age	0.041	1.206	-0.026 ~ 0.107	1.930	0.518
Years Assigned in Thailand	0.096**	2.800	0.029 ~ 0.164	1.843	0.543
PSS	0.152**	2.705	0.042 ~ 0.263	1.016	0.984
R^2	0.102				
Adjusted R^2	0.093				
F-value	$F(4,389) = 11.088^{**}$				

Note: Dependent variable = Expatriation Willingness (EX); Perceived Social Support (PSS); * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis performed to test the differential impacts of perceived social support sources on expatriation willingness, addressing the study's objective 2. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(6, 387) = 9.983$, * $p < .001$), accounting for 12.1% of the variance in the dependent variable (Adjusted $R^2 = .121$).

Analysis of the control variables indicated that tenure in Thailand exerted a significant positive influence on expatriation willingness ($\beta = 0.089$, $t = 2.614$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.022, 0.156]). In contrast, neither gender nor age emerged as a statistically significant predictor.

Pertaining to the main predictors, the results provide differential support for the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1a was supported, as perceived social support from coworkers (PSSC) was a significant positive predictor of expatriation willingness ($\beta = 0.102$, * $t = 3.168$, * $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.039, 0.165]). Similarly, Hypothesis 1b was supported, with perceived social support from leaders (PSSL) demonstrating a significant positive relationship with the outcome variable ($\beta = 0.205$, * $t = 3.268$, * $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.082, 0.329]). However, Hypothesis 1c was not supported, as perceived social support from family (PSSF) was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.022$, * $p = .447$, 95% CI [-0.080, 0.035]).

In summary, the findings indicate that support from organizational sources (leaders and coworkers) significantly positively influences expatriation willingness, whereas support from personal sources (family) does not exhibit a significant relationship with the outcome.

Table 4.

Results of Linear Regression Analysis: Perceived Coworker, Leaders and Family Support Predicting Expatriation Willingness.

Variables	Coefficient (β)	t-value	95% CI (Lower–Upper)	VIF	Tolerance
Gender	0.057	0.985	-0.057 ~ 0.171	1.412	0.708
Age	0.048	1.447	-0.017 ~ 0.113	1.938	0.516
Years Assigned in Thailand	0.089**	2.614	0.022 ~ 0.156	1.871	0.535
PSSC	0.102**	3.168	0.039 ~ 0.165	1.057	0.946
PSSL	0.205**	3.268	0.082 ~ 0.329	1.013	0.987
PSSF	-0.022	-0.761	-0.080 ~ 0.035	1.042	0.960
R^2	0.134				
Adjusted R^2	0.121				
F-value	9.983**				

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; The dependent variable is Expatriation Willingness; Perceived Social Support -Leaders (PSSL); Perceived Social Support -Coworker (PSSC); Perceived Social Support - Family (PSSF).

5. Moderation Effect Analysis Results

To test Hypothesis 2, which postulated that Motivational Cultural Intelligence (MCQ) moderates the relationship between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and expatriation willingness, a hierarchical moderated regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5.

The analysis followed a three-step procedure. Model 1, the baseline model, included the control variables (gender, age, and total years of assignment in Thailand). Model 2 added the main effects of the independent variable (PSS) and the moderator (MCQ). Finally, Model 3 introduced the two-way interaction term ($PSS \times MCQ$) to test the moderation effect.

As shown in Model 1, perceived social support demonstrated a significant positive relationship with expatriation willingness ($\beta = 0.152$, $p < .01$), after accounting for the controls. This effect remained stable in Model 2 with the addition of MCQ. Crucially, the results of Model 3 revealed that the interaction term ($PSS \times MCQ$) was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.047$, $t = -0.53$, $p = .595$). This indicates that the positive relationship between PSS and expatriation willingness does not depend on (i.e., is not moderated by) the level of an individual's motivational cultural intelligence. The strength of this positive association remains consistent regardless of whether an individual's MCQ is high or low. Consequently, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Table 5.

Results of Moderated Regression Analysis: The Moderating Role of Motivational CQ (MCQ) on the Relationship Between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and Expatriation Willingness (EW).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	0.064 (1.088)	0.066 (1.130)	0.068 (1.155)
Age	0.041 (1.206)	0.040 (1.187)	0.039 (1.161)
Years Assigned in Thailand	0.096** (2.800)	0.096** (2.789)	0.096** (2.786)
PSS	0.152** (2.705)	0.155** (2.747)	0.152** (2.690)
MCQ		-0.025 (-0.762)	-0.026 (-0.800)
$PSS \times MCQ$			-0.031 (-0.532)
R^2	0.102	0.104	0.104
Adjusted R^2	0.093	0.092	0.090
F-value	$F(4,389) = 11.088^{**}$	$F(5,388) = 8.977^{**}$	$F(6,387) = 7.514^{**}$

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; The dependent variable is Expatriation Willingness; Values in parentheses are t-values.

As shown in Table 6, contrary to our hypothesis, the interaction term between perceived social support (PSS) and cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ) was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 0.48$, $p = .635$). This indicates that the positive relationship between PSS and expatriation willingness (EW), established in Model 1 ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .01$), is not moderated by an individual's level of cognitive

cultural intelligence. In other words, the strength of the positive effect of social support on willingness to expatriate remains consistent, regardless of whether a Mandarin teacher possesses high or low levels of CCQ. Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Table 6.

Results of Moderated Regression Analysis: The Moderating Role of Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (CCQ) on the Relationship Between Perceived Social Support (PSS) and Expatriation Willingness (EW).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	0.064 (1.088)	0.059 (1.011)	0.059 (1.013)
Age	0.041 (1.206)	0.036 (1.065)	0.036 (1.070)
Years Assigned in Thailand	0.096** (2.800)	0.095** (2.764)	0.095** (2.765)
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	0.152** (2.705)	0.129* (2.282)	0.130* (2.295)
Cognitive Cultural Intelligence (CCQ)		0.112* (2.481)	0.110* (2.437)
PSS × CCQ			0.031 (0.475)
R ²	0.102	0.116	0.117
Adjusted R ²	0.093	0.105	0.103
F-value	F(4,389)**	F(5,388)**	F(6,387)=8.537**

Note: *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01; The dependent variable is Expatriation Willingness; Values in parentheses are t-values.

Based on Table 7, the effect of the independent variable PSSC (Perceived Social Support from Colleagues) on the dependent variable EX (Expatriation Willingness) is significant. As shown in the table, PSSC is significant ($t = 3.204$, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$), indicating that PSSC has a significant positive effect on EX. Furthermore, the interaction term between PSSC and CCQ (Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence) is also significant ($t = -2.507$, $p = 0.013 < 0.05$). This implies that the influence of PSSC on EX varies significantly across different levels of the moderator CCQ. The simple slopes analysis in Table 8 further illustrates the slopes analysis. H4 is not supported.

Table 7.

Results of Moderated Regression Analysis: Testing the moderating role of metacognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ) on the relationship between perceived social support from coworkers (PSSC) and expatriation willingness (EX).

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	0.071 (1.216)	0.065 (1.126)	0.069 (1.201)
Age	0.042 (1.248)	0.037 (1.109)	0.035 (1.053)
Years Assigned in Thailand	0.086* (2.512)	0.086* (2.517)	0.082* (2.419)
PSSC	0.103** (3.204)	0.088** (2.704)	0.084* (2.587)
CCQ	—	0.105* (2.312)	0.157** (3.160)
PSSC * CCQ	—	—	-0.109* (-2.507)
R ²	0.109	0.121	0.135
Adjusted R ²	0.100	0.110	0.122
F-value	F(4,389)=11.893**	F(5,388)=10.689**	F(6,387)=10.076**

Note: *p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01; The dependent variable is Expatriation Willingness; Values in parentheses are t-values.

Table 8.

Simple Slopes Analysis: Conditional Effects of Perceived Social Support from Coworkers (PSSC) on Expatriation Willingness (EX) at Different Levels of Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence (CCQ).

Moderator Level	Regression Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Mean	0.084	0.032	2.587	0.010	[0.020, 0.147]
High Level (+1 SD)	0.023	0.041	0.553	0.581	[-0.058, 0.104]
Low Level (-1 SD)	0.144	0.039	3.667	0.000	[0.067, 0.222]

6. Discussion

This study examined how perceived social support and cultural intelligence relate to mainland Chinese Mandarin teachers' willingness to accept teaching assignments in Thailand. Our findings reveal that perceived social support from both coworkers and leaders positively influences expatriation

willingness, supporting H1, H1a, and H1b. This aligns with the Conservation of Resources theory [9], suggesting that social support represents a valuable resource that reduces anticipated stress and uncertainty associated with international assignments. The significance of this study is that it investigated the effects of perceived social support and cultural intelligence on Mainland Chinese Mandarin teachers' willingness to accept expatriate assignments in Thailand. The findings demonstrate that perceived social support from both supervisors and colleagues significantly positively influences expatriation willingness, supporting H1, H1a, and H1b. This aligns with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [9], which posits that social support serves as a critical resource that mitigates perceived stress and uncertainty associated with international relocation. The significance of support from both organizational (supervisors) and peer (colleagues) sources suggests that Chinese teachers value multifaceted support networks when evaluating overseas opportunities.

H1a and H1b are supported; these findings corroborate prior research by Kiema-Junes et al. [14], which established that workplace social support enhances work engagement, dedication, and absorption. Similarly, this study indicates that institutional support from school administrators throughout the expatriation cycle, pre-departure, in-situ, and post-return, positively shapes teachers' overall appraisal of international experiences, thereby increasing their propensity for future assignments. Consistent with the findings of Van der Laken et al. [26], who emphasized that the effectiveness of organizational support is significantly influenced by its "hierarchical proximity" to the expatriate, with supervisory support demonstrating the strongest correlation with assignment success. The present study similarly observed a notable hierarchical effect. Specifically, perceived supervisor support exerted approximately twice the influence on Mandarin teachers' willingness to undertake expatriate assignments compared to support from colleagues. This result further underscores the critical role of leaders' support in shaping expatriation decisions, particularly within the context of educational expatriates.

Contrary to expectations, H1c (perceived family support positively influences expatriation willingness) was not supported. This result may be interpreted through the lens of recent scholarship on low-status expatriates [27], which suggests that family well-being often supersedes individual aspirations. Thus, while familial encouragement may be present, it may be insufficient to override profound concerns regarding displacement, financial stability, and familial disruption associated with expatriation.

The findings of this study indicate that neither motivational cultural intelligence (MCQ) nor cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ) significantly moderates the relationship between perceived social support and expatriation willingness (Hypotheses H2 and H3 were not supported). This result may be closely related to the specific context of the current research. Given the cultural proximity between Thailand and China, as well as the established community of Chinese expatriates in Thailand, the perceived cultural uncertainty among teachers is inherently low. According to the contextual contingency perspective of cultural intelligence [28], the role of CQ is more pronounced in environments with greater cultural distance. In a context characterized by high cultural similarity, such as that between China and Thailand, the marginal benefit of CQ may be attenuated, as social support functions effectively across all levels of CQ. Setti, et al. [29] highlighted that motivational cultural intelligence (MCQ) plays a particularly significant role in enhancing work-related cross-cultural adjustment in contexts marked by low cultural distance, during the initial stages of an international assignment, or among individuals with limited cross-cultural experience. In contrast, the non-significant moderating effect of MCQ in the relationship between perceived social support and expatriation willingness (H2 in this study) can be interpreted from several perspectives:

First, the sample in this study largely consisted of Mandarin teachers with prior expatriate experience in Thailand. Unlike first-time expatriates, individuals with existing cross-cultural experience may rely less on the psychological drive afforded by motivational CQ, drawing instead on accumulated experience and established adaptation strategies. As a result, the additional moderating effect of motivational CQ in the relationship between social support and willingness to undertake international assignments is diminished.

Second, although certain differences exist between Chinese and Thai cultural environments, both belong to the East Asian cultural sphere and share cultural characteristics such as collectivist values and relationship-oriented social norms. In such a “high-similarity–low-perceived-difference” context, expatriate teachers’ reliance on motivational CQ is naturally reduced, as barriers to cross-cultural adaptation are relatively low. Consequently, the incremental value added by motivational CQ is weakened.

Contrary to the original hypothesis (H4), the results indicate that cognitive cultural intelligence (CCQ) negatively moderates the relationship between coworker support and expatriation willingness. While it was expected that higher levels of CCQ would strengthen the positive impact of coworker support, the findings suggest the opposite. One possible explanation is that Mandarin teachers, who typically enjoy high professional status in China, may, when equipped with elevated CCQ, be more sensitive to potential institutional constraints and professional limitations within the Thai educational context. This heightened critical awareness may lead them to more cautiously evaluate the feasibility and long-term implications of accepting an expatriate assignment, thereby diminishing the otherwise positive effect of coworker support.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following two practical recommendations are proposed, along with research limitations and directions for future research:

7.1. *Enhancing Perceived Social Support*

It is recommended that institutions implement a structured pre-departure mentoring program, establishing a formalized system that pairs prospective expatriates with recently returned instructors. This initiative should facilitate the transfer of experiential knowledge, clarify role expectations, and strengthen peer support prior to deployment.

Furthermore, developing a comprehensive peer support network spanning the entire assignment cycle is essential. A sustained, multi-channel support infrastructure encompassing pre-departure, in-country, and re-entry phases can provide continuous psychosocial and instrumental support, thereby mitigating uncertainty and promoting embeddedness within the host environment.

Additionally, standardizing supervisor engagement protocols is critical. Clear institutional procedures must be established to ensure consistent organizational support. Supervisors at both sending and host institutions should actively demonstrate commitment through pre-assignment briefings, structured communication mechanisms during the assignment, and systematic post-return debriefing sessions. Such formalized engagement is vital to providing expatriate teachers with both emotional affirmation and practical assistance throughout their international assignments.

7.2. *Strengthening Cultural Intelligence*

Chinese universities should prioritize the development of cultural intelligence, particularly cognitive CQ, among Mandarin teachers being considered for overseas assignments. Consistent with Zhang et al. (2024), a structured pre-departure training program spanning 4–6 weeks is advised. This curriculum should incorporate practical instruction on relevant local laws and regulatory frameworks, enhance teachers’ awareness of their legal rights, and strengthen their procedural competence in navigating host-country administrative systems. These competencies are essential for managing issues such as residence permit applications, formal reporting to local authorities, and the use of situationally appropriate language in institutional contexts. By deepening teachers’ understanding of Thai cultural and institutional environments, such training can substantially increase their confidence and willingness to undertake international assignments.

8. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The modest R-squared value suggests that the independent variables included in the model have limited explanatory power, indicating that future research should incorporate additional predictors to enhance model fit and predictive validity. Although motivational cultural intelligence (MCQ) demonstrated correlational value, it did not exhibit a significant moderating effect on expatriation willingness. Subsequent studies could therefore explore its potential direct effects on willingness or other related outcome variables. Furthermore, the influence of motivational CQ may be overshadowed by more immediate contextual factors, such as clearly defined financial incentives for expatriates, pre-existing social networks, or structured institutional support mechanisms.

Additionally, the exclusive focus on teachers from a single province in China may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include participants from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds to enable cross-regional and cross-cultural comparisons. Finally, the reliance on linear regression modeling may fail to capture potential nonlinear or interaction effects between variables. Future investigations could benefit from employing more advanced multivariate nonlinear techniques, such as machine learning algorithms or polynomial regression, to uncover complex relationships.

Despite these limitations, this study offers actionable insights for Thai universities and Confucius Institutes aiming to improve teacher management systems and support structures for Mandarin teachers in international postings.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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