

NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUN
Academia Copernicana Interdisciplinary PhD School
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management

mgr Xiaochen Bu

Building positive relationships at Sino-Polish workplace in Poland

Scientific Supervisors
Prof. dr hab. Aldona Glińska-Neweś
Prof. Pauliina Ulkuniemi, PhD

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Abstract

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, Poland has gradually emerged as a key gateway for the “New Silk Road” into Europe. The country has attracted a steadily growing number of Chinese who choose to live and work there. Alongside this trend, research on Chinese migration has increasingly focused on livelihood and social integration in Poland, often within the broader framework of “Far East Migrants.” However, Poland still has a relatively small number of Chinese employees, especially Chinese self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) who choose to work in Poland independently. There remains a lack of systematic empirical research on their workplace experiences, intercultural communication, and workplace relational mechanisms with local Polish employees. Addressing this gap, this study focuses on Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces. It aims to explain the relational dynamics between Chinese and Polish employees, and to further explore how positive coworker relationships are built, repaired, and sustained.

Globalization has accelerated cross-regional migration. Superdiversity captures this growing complexity, describing new demographic realities where people from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds live together in major urban centers. This shift has brought in diverse forms of human capital (Foner, 2017). As superdiversity changes migration contexts, ethnocentric frameworks no longer explain expatriate adaptation. Expatriate adaptation is a cross-cultural, dynamic process with the potential for reversals. This study takes differentiated embedding as its core lens, defined by workplace feelings of belonging and attachment, and examines these through relational, spatial, and temporal processes. The study centers on high-quality connections as the key outcome. It also applies the Chinese relational logic of Guanxi, analyzing its direct and moderating effects in Sino-Polish teams to show how workplace relationships quality takes shape and endures. In this study, workplace positive relationships go beyond casual coworker contact or social friendliness. Instead, they refer to a bidirectional relational experience through which Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees continually adjust their behaviors and attitudes, enabling mutual adaptation and coordination.

The research design collected data from Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees in Poland through a mixed-methods approach. In study 1, a questionnaire survey was used to examine Chinese self-initiated expatriates' experiences of workplace belonging and attachment, their perceptions of Guanxi, and their overall evaluations of Sino-Polish workplace high-quality connections. In study 2, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees to explore the dynamic processes of their differentiated embedding, as well as their genuine experiences and interpretations of workplace Guanxi and their resulting perceptions of Sino-Polish workplace relationships.

By examining the causal links between differentiated embedding and interpersonal relationships quality in cross-cultural workplaces, the study positions differentiated embedding as an antecedent of high-quality connections and highlights the significant role of Guanxi in relational construction. The findings indicate that enhancing the feeling of belonging and attachment, along with the culturally sensitive use of Guanxi, substantially increases the likelihood of developing positive interpersonal workplace relationships. This provides a new explanatory perspective for cross-cultural organizational behavior research.

Overall, building on these findings, the study offers new empirical evidence and practical guidance for organizations and individuals involved in Sino-Polish cross-cultural environments to foster and sustain high-quality coworker relationships.

Introduction

“Work relationships reflect the full spectrum of quality. At their best, they can be a generative source of enrichment, vitality, and learning that helps individuals, groups, and organizations grow, thrive, and flourish. At their worst, they can be a toxic and corrosive source of pain, depletion, and dysfunction” (Dutton and Ragins, 2017, p3).

Relationships are crucial in a workplace. Building quality work relationships benefits both organizations and individuals. While positive relationships at work have gradually attracted scholarly attention, understanding of cross-cultural workplaces remains limited. Consequently, literature on positive relationships in cross-cultural environments, particularly in Sino-Polish workplaces, is scarce. It is worth asking: How do Polish and Chinese employees subjectively experience working together? Are they able to overcome cultural barriers such as language, communication styles, and organizational norms to establish and sustain positive interpersonal relationships?

This study addresses this gap by investigating how positive coworker relationships are established in Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces. Specifically, it examines how the differentiated embedding of Chinese self-initiated expatriates influences the development of positive interpersonal relationships with their Polish colleagues.

Research Background

Academic literature has long recognized that, compared to organizational expatriates, self-initiated expatriates are not only more prevalent but also more sought after in the global labor market. Existing studies indicate that self-initiated expatriates outnumber organizational expatriates worldwide (Biemann and Andresen, 2010; Swim et al., 2011). This is primarily because self-initiated expatriates independently choose to pursue international work without contractual ties to a single employer. In contrast, assigned expatriates usually must return to their original companies after completing their international roles. Self-initiated expatriates

enjoy greater autonomy and flexibility in shaping their international careers (Noman et al., 2023).

Existing research on expatriate adjustment has largely focused on Western populations (Makkonen, 2016), with noticeably insufficient attention to Asian contexts. There are substantial cultural and institutional differences between Western and Asian environments (Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018; Noman et al., 2020, 2023). Within this differentiated landscape and given the dispersed and uncertain nature of self-initiated expatriates worldwide, research on Chinese self-initiated expatriates remains particularly limited.

Chinese migration to Poland is relatively recent but rapidly evolving. It is shaped by both traditional migration patterns and contemporary dynamics. According to Kardaszewicz (2018) and Kardaszewicz and Wrotek (2020), early migration was influenced by two interconnected pathways. The first was chain migration: Chinese migrants engaged in trade and commercial activities in Poland, gradually bringing relatives and close associates from China to help expand their businesses. These newcomers acquired trade-related skills and further extended migration chains within Poland (Christiansen, 2013). The second pathway arose through shuttle-trading practices. In this model, Chinese migrants initially transported goods across borders for short-term sales, gradually expanding trade routes from China through Central and Eastern Europe to destinations such as Moscow and Budapest. Eventually, they established more stable commercial bases in Poland (Nyíri, 2003, 2007; Kardaszewicz and Wrotek, 2020).

Over time, these two migration pathways converged and formed the core of the early Chinese migrant population in Poland. This group largely engaged in import and wholesale trade activities (Wysieńska, 2012; Wardęga, 2017). These communities often had dense internal networks but limited interaction with the host society. As a result, they were frequently described as an invisible minority (Moore and Tubilewicz, 2001; Nyíri, 2014). Studies suggest that Chinese migrants' sense of belonging and integration patterns in Poland remain fluid. Their migration trajectories rarely follow a linear path toward permanent settlement or full integration. Many adopt flexible mobility strategies and position Poland as a link in a broader transnational network connecting China and other parts of Europe (Kardaszewicz, 2018; Ożegalska-Lukasik,

2025). Emerging forms of Chinese migration, such as expatriates and white-collar professionals, have received comparatively limited scholarly attention, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Kardaszewicz and Wrotek, 2020).

In recent years, as research on migration and expatriate adaptation has gained momentum, the concept of differentiated embedding has been introduced to better capture the complexity of expatriate experiences. This concept describes expatriate differentiated embedding as a dynamic, multi-layered process of belonging and attachment that involves relational, spatial, and temporal dynamics (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014, 2015, 2021). According to this perspective, relationships between expatriates and their environments change over time, and maintaining them requires continuous effort. Thus, adaptation should not be viewed as a stable state once achieved. Instead, it represents an ongoing process situated along a continuum of attachment, trust, and reciprocity that may strengthen or weaken through interaction (Ryan and Mulholland, 2015). When these elements are successfully developed, expatriates are more likely to integrate into the local environment and transform weak professional ties into genuine friendships with host employees (Habti, 2021).

The quality of workplace relationships is central to expatriate adjustment, especially in differentiated embedding contexts. Organizational behavior research highlights employee relationships as essential for positive workplace interactions and as key organizational assets (Reich and Hershcovis, 2011). When healthy relationships are actively promoted, organizations foster communities of belonging that extend both inside and outside the workplace (Baker and Dutton, 2007). Empirical evidence shows workplace friendships enhance job satisfaction, engagement, commitment, and perceptions of support (Nwinyokpugi and Omunakwe, 2019). Recently, scholarly attention has intensified on interpersonal communication and workplace relationships, particularly in cross-cultural settings, where such interactions are now seen as pivotal for both organizational performance and individual experience (Jian, 2012; Bergbom and Kinnunen, 2014; Crossman, 2022; Fu and Charoensukmongkol, 2023).

Building on the previous discussion that highlighted the importance of interpersonal communication and the development of positive workplace relationships in cross-cultural

settings, the role of host country employees has also gained increasing attention. A recent meta-analysis found that support from host country colleagues has a stronger positive effect on expatriate adjustment than support from other expatriates (van der Laken et al., 2019). This is primarily because expatriates typically engage more with host country colleagues in the workplace than with fellow expatriates (Liu and Shaffer, 2005; Chun-Hsiao and Soo Min Toh, 2021). Furthermore, as globalization accelerates, many host country employees in modern workplaces are highly educated and increasingly demonstrate global competence, such as experience studying or working abroad (Tung, 2016). As a result, host country employees are no longer merely passive recipients in cross-cultural encounters but are increasingly playing an active role in facilitating intercultural collaboration and shaping workplace relationships.

Based on these research findings, both scholars and practitioners have increasingly recognized that effective relationships between expatriates and employees in the host country should be grounded in frequent and high-quality interactions (Van Bakel et al., 2015; Varma et al., 2016; Van Bakel, 2019; Van Bakel et al., 2022; Yusuf et al., 2022). Such interactions need to be understood and analyzed from the perspectives of both parties. For example, Van Bakel (2019) emphasized that interactions between expatriates and host country nationals “take two to tango”. Earlier, Vance et al. (2014) also called for greater inclusion of host country nationals’ perspectives in studies of expatriation, which can help explain the complex and interesting processes involved in relationship building between these two groups. Thus, in cross-cultural workplaces, both expatriates and host country employees continually adjust their behaviors and attitudes during interactions to achieve mutual adaptation and coordination. However, when the quality of these interactions is low, employees in the host country may be unwilling to establish or maintain meaningful relationships with expatriates (Chun-Hsiao and Soo Min Toh, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this study zeroes in on Chinese self-initiated expatriates and local Polish employees, aiming to clarify how both groups adapt and form effective workplace relationships in cross-cultural environments. Its core purpose is to identify mechanisms that create and sustain positive workplace ties. The next section summarizes the context of Chinese employees in Poland and presents the research design.

The Local Context: Poland as a Destination for Chinese Employees

As the job market becomes increasingly global, many individuals, including Chinese citizens, seek employment abroad to improve their living conditions and educational opportunities. Reflecting this trend, the Chinese government has shifted its stance towards overseas Chinese, now viewing them as both a cultural resource and a symbol of national influence, as important bridges for international exchange.

In this context, Poland has gradually emerged as a noteworthy destination for Chinese in the 21st century. Since its accession to the European Union in 2004, Poland has attracted a steadily growing Chinese community, now ranking as the seventh-largest foreign community in the country and expanding at a rate surpassed only by the Ukrainian community (Wardęga, 2017). Nevertheless, more recent global surveys indicate a gradual improvement in public perceptions of China worldwide, with younger generations showing greater openness and more favorable attitudes than older groups (Silver, Devlin, & Huang, 2019).

Another driver of this trend is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched in 2013. The Belt and Road Initiative aims to expand China's global economic and political influence. Poland plays a strategic role as a gateway to Europe because of its geographic location, logistics infrastructure, and labor market potential (Kostecka-Tomaszewska and Czerewacz-Filipowicz, 2019). Scholars argue that Poland's lower labor costs and qualified workforce make it attractive for Chinese greenfield investments (Kostecka-Tomaszewska and Czerewacz-Filipowicz, 2019). The growing presence of Chinese companies reflects Poland's rise as a hub for Chinese business activity and expatriate employment (Wardęga, 2017).

From the perspective of Chinese employees in Poland, many are hired by large Chinese multinational corporations, while others work for Polish firms collaborating with Chinese businesses. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including unmet expectations regarding salaries and working conditions, language barriers, and difficulties in securing residence permits. As a result, some Chinese expatriates perceive their stay in Poland as temporary, treating it as a steppingstone to other Schengen countries (Wardęga, 2017). Even as the number of Chinese

workers grows, many adopt a transient orientation, showing limited investment in learning about Polish culture or integrating into local society.

Academic research indicates that self-initiated expatriates tend to adapt more effectively to host environments than organizational expatriates (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2009; Froese, 2012). It is unclear if this also applies to Chinese self-initiated expatriates in Poland. Some studies address expatriate adaptation and workplace relationships in general (Bergbom and Kinnunen, 2014; Pustovit, 2020), but no research has focused on Chinese self-initiated expatriates in the Sino-Polish workplace, which means researchers know nothing about how they adjust to cross-cultural work settings, how they interact with Polish colleagues, and what factors help or hinder positive workplace relationships.

Study Aims and Research Questions

A diverse workplace can be dynamic and integrative, creating innovation, flexibility, and resilience (Maharani et al., 2022). This recognition is driving the recent trend of hiring from diverse cultural backgrounds. Diversity is seen not just as demographic variation, but as a vital source of organizational learning, creativity, and competitive advantage.

Individuals' preferences in communication styles are influenced by cultural backgrounds, languages, and socially specific factors that shape cognitive patterns and structures (Gut and Wilczewski, 2015). These cultural variations suggest that employees in different countries hold distinct expectations and priorities at work (Morris et al., 2008). In encounters between Chinese and Polish coworkers, notable differences in social values, behaviors, and communication practices emerge, while the existing literature on the specific workplace experiences of Chinese people in Poland remains underexplored. The formulation of the research questions is grounded in the theoretical concept of differentiated embedding (Ryan, 2011), which emphasizes that individuals experience and shape attachment and belonging through temporal, spatial, and relational processes across cultural contexts. This concept is particularly relevant to intercultural workplaces, where employees' integration processes are not uniform but shaped by their interpersonal experiences, organizational contexts, and cultural expectations. In the

Sino-Polish workplace context, differentiated embedding provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish colleagues construct, maintain, or negotiate workplace relationships of different quality and depth.

Building upon this foundation, the study incorporates Guanxi (Yen et al., 2011), a culturally rooted relational concept in Chinese society, as both a moderating and independent variable to examine its manifestations and functions within Sino-Polish workplaces. In addition, high-quality connections (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003) are used as a key indicator to assess the extent to which positive workplace relationships form between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees (host country nationals). Taken together, these frameworks guide the inquiry into how differentiated embedding and Guanxi relational practices intertwine in shaping the development of positive relationships in the Sino-Polish intercultural workplace.

The aim of this study is to examine how Chinese self-initiated expatriates and local Polish employees build positive coworker relationships within the Sino-Polish workplace. Specifically, the study:

- investigates links between workplace belonging, workplace attachment, and differentiated embedding of Chinese self-initiated expatriates, and their positive relationships with Polish coworkers,
- examines the role of Guanxi in the process of building Sino-Polish workplace relations,
- explores the relational, spatial, and temporal processes in constructing differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace,
- identifies forms of high-quality connections that emerge in the Sino-Polish workplace.

Ultimately, this research aims to provide an understanding of the formation and maintenance of high-quality connections in Sino-Polish workplaces, offering practical implications for Chinese and Polish enterprises employing Chinese self-initiated expatriates.

Drawing on the research aims, this study is designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates' workplace attachment and belonging build differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace?

RQ2: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates' workplace attachment, belonging, and differentiated embedding influence positive relationships with Polish coworkers?

RQ3: What role does the Chinese Guanxi play in fostering positive relationships in the Sino-Polish workplace and their links with workplace attachment, belonging, and differentiated embedding?

RQ4: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish coworkers co-construct relational, spatial, and temporal processes of differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace?

RQ5: What forms of high-quality connections emerge between Chinese and Polish employees in the Sino-Polish workplace?

The Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees working in Poland, regardless of the size or type of their organization, as long as both groups are present in the same workplace. This ensures the existence of a cross-cultural working environment suitable for analysis and discussion.

Methodologically, the study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the quantitative component reveals general trends and statistical associations between variables, while the qualitative component explores the underlying mechanisms and cultural contexts in greater depth. Together, these complementary methods ensure that the findings may be both generalizable and capable of capturing the complexity and diversity of cross-cultural interactions in Sino-Polish work environments.

Building on this methodological foundation, for the quantitative study, the survey was conducted among Chinese self-initiated expatriates working in Sino-Polish environments, capturing their subjective experiences related to workplace attachment, belonging, Guanxi, and cross-cultural relationship building. The sample comprised 122 Chinese self-initiated expatriates working across various sectors in Poland. In parallel, the qualitative study included

semi-structured interviews with both Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees. These interviews enabled the researcher to gain in-depth insights into the quality of employee relationships across different industries, as well as the mutual influence that emerges during intercultural interactions. Seven pairs of Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees from different industries participated in the study, providing diverse perspectives and rich insights into workplace experiences.

To ensure the study's scientific rigor, multiple validated measurement instruments were used in the quantitative phase, and the qualitative interview questions aligned with the research aims. Furthermore, both studies employed analytical tools aligned with their aims, facilitating a systematic and multi-layered exploration of coworker relationships in Sino-Polish workplaces.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises five chapters. It begins with the introduction of the study, outlining its practical background and academic context. This section also states the purpose, significance, questions, objectives, and scope. Together, these elements lay the foundation for the thesis.

Chapter One provides a comprehensive literature review. It reviews and evaluates research on expatriate studies, cross-cultural adaptation, and theories of differentiated embedding. It also covers advancements in the study of employee relationships. The chapter identifies gaps in the current literature and proposes the theoretical framework for this study. This sets the stage for the next chapter's explanation of methodology.

Chapter Two presents the methodological framework of the research. It introduces the overall research design and the structure of the two studies, detailing their respective research models, research questions, and analytical approaches. The chapter further elaborates on the hypotheses of Study 1 and on the questionnaire design and coding tree employed in Study 2. In addition, it provides basic statistical descriptions of the two target populations, offering a clearer context for the research samples. The chapter also explains the approach used to integrate the two studies and the procedures for synthesizing the findings.

Chapter Three presents main quantitative findings from study 1, including reliability and validity tests, confirmatory factor analysis, and regression analyses. It summarizes and interprets relationships among variables in response to research questions, paving the way for qualitative and integrated analyses.

Building on the quantitative results, Chapter Four presents qualitative results and a mixed-methods integration. It begins with thematic analysis of interviews about cross-cultural workplace relationships, then integrates results through a joint display, demonstrating complementarity and mutual validation, and addresses research questions explored through qualitative and mixed methods. This integration creates a foundation for the discussion and conclusion in the final chapter.

Chapter Five provides a discussion followed with conclusion. Building on the research findings, it explores theoretical contributions, academic implications, managerial insights, limitations, and future research directions, concluding with the study's contribution to understanding Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplace relationships and offering practical management insights.

To sum up, this research makes several contributions to cross-cultural workplace research. It extends the differentiated embedding framework to the Sino-Polish context and examines the role of Guanxi in building positive coworker relationships. Using a mixed-methods approach, it provides theoretical insights and practical implications for building positive relationships and mutual adjustment in Sino-Polish organizational settings.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature across three key domains: research on expatriates, studies on immigrant adjustment, and investigations into coworker relationships. These areas have been carefully selected to provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation. The focus is on how Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees build interpersonal relationships within Sino-Polish workplaces. By combining theoretical perspectives and empirical work across these three strands, this chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the research model and empirical strategy used in this study.

1.1 Expatriate Research Review

1.1.1 Self-initiated and Assigned Expatriate

Contemporary global work includes an ever-growing range of international work configurations. Along with the diversification of the global workforce, the boundaries of today's business world are increasingly global (Javidan and House, 2002). One characteristic of globalization is the increased mobility of highly skilled workers across countries. As demand for people with diverse language and environmental backgrounds varies around the world, more people are interested in expanding their careers abroad. Similarly, the global economy values educated and skilled labor regardless of race or background (Briscoe et al., 2009). Those who choose to live abroad for a period, either spontaneously or passively, for employment or professional reasons, are known as expatriates. Expatriates generally come from different ethnic groups compared with other local employees; they socialize and work in other countries with different cultural traditions. Expatriates' daily working language is not their native language; their professional and communicative skills come from studying and working in different places, so they are typically temporary migrants (Nekvapil and Sherman, 2018). In addition, expatriates, due to their extensive work experience abroad, possess the knowledge and expertise to take on positions across various organizations and departments. They may even

hold managerial positions in overseas institutions. Apart from being referred to as temporary migrants, they can also be termed as “elite migrants” or “high-skilled migrants” (Dong, 2017).

In a global cultural context, expatriates are divided into two types: assigned expatriates (AEs) or called organizational expatriates (OEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) (Biemann and Andresen, 2010; Doherty and Dickmann, 2013; Przytuła, 2015). The increasing importance of expatriates in the global labor market makes the conceptual and empirical separation of assigned expatriates (AEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) very important (Suutari and Brewster 2000; Myers and Pringle 2005; Peltokorpi et al., 2009). Andresen et al. (2014) argue that the terms self-initiated and assigned expatriate can overlap and even be confused in expatriate studies, thereby causing confusion for the reader. And Baruch et al. (2013) also note that, regardless of whether expatriates are long- or short-term, from organizational sponsorship to self-initiated, different criteria should be established to differentiate expatriates.

Thus, on this basis, the term “assigned expatriate” refers to a specific professional group of non-host-country employees working in international companies. It mainly includes specialists, engineers, managers, and other technical professionals who are sent abroad by their home organizations to work in overseas subsidiaries and who return to their home country upon completion of their assignments (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2010; Przytuła, 2015). Briscoe et al. (2009) define self-initiated expatriates as “individuals who travel abroad (usually as tourists or students) but who seek work as they travel and are hired in the foreign location, often by firms from their home country” (p.169). In contrast to assigned expatriates (AEs), in today’s economic environment, the rapid growth of international companies and the changing business environment require that companies and their employees should be more flexible in their development to adapt to the ever-changing international context. Self-initiated expatriates actively seek international assignments rather than being assigned by the organization and undertake their own career development in non-national countries without direct organizational support (Carr et al., 2005), often in shorter, less costly and more flexible ways of working in order to better pursue their development (Przytuła, 2015). Thus, those who choose to leave their home countries and move abroad independently of their employers to pursue their own career

paths are summarized as “self-initiated expatriates” (SIEs) (Jokinen et al., 2008; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). In comparison, the assigned expatriate expects a clear and favorable career structure, while the self-initiated expatriate prefers to follow his or her own path and looks forward to new collaborations with employers abroad (Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Andresen et al., 2014; Suutari et al., 2018).

There are still significant differences between assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates in several dimensions. A review of the previous literature reveals that experience and decision-making differ between these two categories of expatriates on many issues. For example, factors such as time perceptions, motivation for a career abroad, non-work related back support, and level of acculturation vary accordingly (Araujo B et al., 2014). Assigned expatriates are sent abroad by their home company for a pre-specified period, with plans to return to their home country to continue their development. As a result, their work plans abroad generally range from a few months to several years. In contrast, self-initiated expatriates decide to work abroad on their own initiative, without any time limit and based on their own personal career plans (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Consequently, self-initiated expatriates may demonstrate a more stable career orientation, plan to stay for a specific period or for life or even become immigrants. However, these plans are often not fixed but change in response to the surrounding environment, personal development opportunities, and other relevant factors (Doherty, 2013).

At the same time, scholars have come to understand that assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates have very different motivations for their careers. Of course, both are considered for better living conditions, future development, and other favorable factors, but the main motivations are different. Assigned expatriates are often motivated by financial reasons and by a desire to build career capital (Dickmann and Doherty, 2013), or by future career development opportunities, such as overseas work experience that can lead to more opportunities for promotion to supervisor roles (Carpenter et al., 2001). The spontaneous behavior of self-initiated expatriates makes them see their overseas experience as a form of self-development, part of the realization of their career path, an adventure, and an exploration

(Doherty and Dickmann, 2012), and the fulfillment of a personal agenda (Howe-Walsh and Schyns, 2010; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009).

Work-related support also highlights the differences between assigned and self-initiated expatriates. Konopaske and Werner (2005) argue that companies often grant assigned expatriates the right to a compensation package, which may include language and cultural training before going to work abroad, as well as financial assistance and non-work-related support, such as housing and education for their children. Thus, employees can review the job content offered to them and choose to accept or reject the offer (Andresen et al., 2014). Self-initiated expatriates, on the contrary, need to build and secure for themselves their basic rights and standard of living, but in contrast, self-initiated expatriates tend to have more social interaction with local people and will therefore integrate more quickly into the local living environment and learn more successfully from the experience of living and working in the host country (Peltokorpi, 2007).

1.1.2 Expatriates in Cross-cultural Workplaces

The study of assigned and self-initiated expatriates has expanded as the number of multinational companies has increased. Punnett and Shenkar (2004) argue that human resource allocation in an international context has become quite complex and that there are distinct advantages and disadvantages associated with different types of human resources. The management and adaptation of expatriate staff remain important concerns for organizations (Collings and Scullion, 2006; Bednarová et al., 2018; Gai et al., 2021; Setti et al., 2022). From the perspective of expatriate group studies, researchers have examined how the personal characteristics of expatriates influence their communication competence, job performance, and overall effectiveness in the workplace (Holopainen and Björkman, 2005; Bhatti et al., 2014; Harari et al., 2018; Fu and Charoensukmongkol, 2022). In addition to the cohort study, research on assigned and self-initiated expatriates has its own characteristics.

Assigned expatriate research in management is important because companies want assigned expatriates to adjust to a multinational environment quickly and understand their own drivers

and what can be achieved within the organizational environment (Dickmann and Doherty, 2010). Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) argued that because assigned expatriates can significantly impact organizational tasks, research on them should also prioritize job-related factors, such as task performance and job satisfaction. This focus on job-related factors can ultimately improve the success of expatriation assignments. Furthermore, the adaptation of assigned expatriates in cross-cultural environments has garnered significant attention from researchers and scholars. Classic theories suggest that organizational expatriates not only need to adjust to changes in their job duties but also must adapt to various aspects of the work environment, culture, language barriers, and other factors (Hechanova et al., 2003). These conditions can impose additional intangible costs and increase the likelihood of mission failure. A similar view is shared by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005), who, based on this perspective, have shown that organizational expatriates can employ their relational skills to foster interpersonal relationships and employ various tools and techniques to build connections. These efforts enable organizational expatriates to become acquainted with the cultural norms and discern what is considered acceptable or unacceptable in the host culture. However, much of the research is based on data from multinational companies and is largely subcontracted to employers to define. If they are included in the employer's database under that heading, then they are called assigned expatriates (Suutari et al., 2018).

Compared with the assigned expatriates, the last decade of research literature on self-initiated expatriates has grown and received significant attention, particularly in contrast to earlier literature focusing predominantly on assigned expatriates (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013; Vaiman et al., 2015; Isakovic and Whitman, 2019; Andresen et al., 2020, 2023). Scholars have used various terms to conceptualize this group, such as: "overseas experience" (OE) (Inkson et al. 1997), "self-designed apprenticeship" (Arthur et al. 1999), "self-directed expatriates" (Banai and Harry, 2004) "free travelers" (Myers and Pringle, 2005), "International itinerants" (Mckenna and Richardson, 2007), "self-initiated movers"(Thorn, 2009), ultimately "self-initiated expatriates" widely used by scholars.

Subsequent studies have broadened the understanding of self-initiated expatriates. Research has moved from basic definitions from clarifying who self-initiated expatriates are (Suutari and Brewster, 2000; Bhuian and Mengue, 2002; Selmer and Luring, 2012; Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Andresen et al., 2014) to investigating why they choose expatriation (Suutari and Brewster, 2001; Selmer and Luring, 2012) and how they benefit their organizations (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Rodriguez and Scurry, 2014; Vaiman et al., 2015). Researchers have also examined their motivations and cross-cultural adjustment (Doherty et al., 2011; Froese, 2012), developing a stronger understanding of this growing group. According to Cao, Hirschi, and Deller (2013), positive intercultural adjustment among self-initiated expatriates influences their career attitudes, career satisfaction, and willingness to stay in the host country. Moreover, successful self-initiated expatriates tend to show greater cultural competence and are better equipped to interact effectively with host-country coworkers (AlMazrouei and Pech, 2014). Singh et al. (2021) found that these expatriates are more likely to work alongside host-country coworkers. Over the last twenty years, research has made clear distinctions between assigned and self-initiated expatriates.

One key gap in the literature is the lack of distinction between assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. As Joshua-Gojer (2016) states, most of the expatriates covered in the study are professionals sent by organizations on international assignments, also known as assigned expatriates. Not surprisingly, data collection is easier for well organized, company-backed, assigned expatriates, and academics have done much work to develop expertise in this area.

However, unlike assigned expatriates, self-initiated expatriates do not have the support of an associated company and rely on individual decision-making and self-development within a large group. There is no doubt that self-initiated expatriates contribute to the labor market. Therefore, academics, businesses, and policymakers acknowledge the value that self-initiated expatriates bring to organizational performance and economic development (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013).

Aside from their own values, the workplace's influence on them is also highly significant. It is also evident that the influence of a cross-cultural workplace on expatriates is substantial

(Albrecht, Dilchert, Deller, and Paulus, 2014; Alabi and Šarkiūnaitė, 2022; Stoermer, Haslberger, Froese, and Kraeh, 2018). Furthermore, coworkers who collaborate with expatriate employees in such environments play an even more integral role in shaping multicultural workplace dynamics, as their ongoing interactions with self-initiated expatriates have a lasting impact. Host-country employees often serve as a vital source of information about local norms, values, and cultural expectations. The support they offer can significantly help expatriates adapt more effectively to their new job and the host culture (Toh and DeNisi, 2007). As a result, research on host country employees and expatriates has begun to emerge. For example, several studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of host nationals' attitudes and behaviors toward expatriates (Kang and Shen, 2018), as well as the role of host-country coworkers in supporting expatriate adjustment and relationship building (Mahajan and De Silva, 2012; Varma et al., 2016). Host-country employee support has been shown to mitigate the negative effects of expatriate adjustment challenges (Mahajan and De Silva, 2012). Additionally, research has highlighted the importance of trust and knowledge sharing between host-country employees and expatriates (Toh and Srinivas, 2012). Without a doubt, the internal diversity of an organization, across dimensions such as profession, culture, race, and language which is shaped by the contributions of both expatriates and local staff.

Despite more research, key gaps remain. Many studies emphasize the support local staff provide to expatriates and the importance of intercultural relationships, but few examine how expatriates and host-country employees adapt to each other's cultures in cross-cultural workplaces. Research also rarely explores how to build truly positive, mutually beneficial relationships between these groups.

1.1.3 Chinese Expatriates Related Research

As a new and rapidly emerging market, China has seen a surge in investment in overseas markets in recent years, and Chinese companies are investing increasingly abroad, often using expatriates to coordinate the global management of the organization's operations. However, the

Chinese context is significantly different from the mainstream Western environment (Chen and Miller, 2010; Lyles et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2017).

Despite the growing number of Chinese expatriates worldwide, the academic literature on this population remains limited and fragmented. Most existing studies tend to focus on foreign expatriates working in China, often emphasizing the role of local Chinese employees in shaping their experiences and adjustment (e.g., Varma et al., 2009, 2012; Varma, Budhwar, and Pichler, 2011; Van Bakel, 2019; Jannesari and Sullivan, 2021). In contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to Chinese expatriates working abroad, particularly their cross-cultural interactions with host-country nationals.

However, some cross-cultural scholars have conducted in-depth studies of Chinese expatriate workers overseas in various regions. Given that Chinese culture and workplace practices are widely recognized for their distinctiveness (Chuang et al., 2015; Varma et al., 2016), these studies offer valuable insights.

Nadeem et al. (2018) examined the adjustment experiences of 30 Chinese expatriates in Pakistan and found that cross-cultural work environments significantly influence their behaviors and work habits. However, Chinese expatriates tend to interact primarily with their coworkers in the host country at work, rather than in daily social activities, which may prevent them from developing deeper relationships with local employees and hinder their adaptation as expatriates. The scholars have attributed this pattern to the enduring and stable nature of Chinese cultural values and beliefs (Farh et al., 2010; Lin et al., 2016). In addition, Nadeem et al. (2018) suggest that Chinese expatriates may tend to remain within their own cultural group for extended periods, thereby further restricting their engagement with Pakistani colleagues.

Lin, Li, and Roelfsema (2018) conducted their research in a European cultural context by studying 30 Chinese expatriate managers working in the Netherlands. They found that the leadership styles of these managers continued to be influenced by Chinese management practices, given the long history of cross-cultural friction between Western leaders and Asian followers, as well as the complexity of both formal and informal relationships within Chinese culture. The findings suggest that Chinese expatriate managers do not seek harmony with local

employees but rather adjust their behavior directly, for example, by using Chinese management tools or developing formal or informal relationships. Alternatively, they may choose to set aside cultural differences and remain neutral to promote professional work behavior. However, these negative influences can sour cross-cultural interpersonal relations and affect the organization. Specifically, the study highlights the importance of Guanxi for Chinese expatriate employees. According to Weng (2014), “Guanxi refers to formal and informal personal connection between two individuals bounded by an implicit psychological contract featuring long-term relationships in Chinese societies” (p.321). Lin, Li, and Roelfsema (2018) argue that Chinese expatriate managers attempt to bring this Guanxi skill into the intercultural workplace.

In a global cultural context, Yao (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 Chinese expatriates and found that Chinese cultural values significantly shape their perceptions of organizational practices and personal behavior. It shows that Chinese expatriates are not interested in familiarizing themselves with the cultural backgrounds of other countries because their long-term career goals remain in China. Compared to expatriates from other countries, Chinese expatriates tend to prioritize maintaining connections with their home organizations. Notably, Yao (2014) also highlighted the influence of Guanxi in shaping Chinese expatriates’ interactions in cross-cultural workplaces. Chinese expatriate employees bring a unique Chinese culture and Guanxi into the cross-cultural workplace. Chatterjee et al. (2006) note that Guanxi fosters shared exchanges among Chinese individuals, and many Chinese expatriates seek to extend this practice to collegial relationships in host countries. In some cases, they may place greater value on relational networks than on individual skills or professional qualifications.

Wang et al. (2017) examined the cultural adjustment of expatriates in Chinese multinational companies, highlighting the importance of cultural background in intercultural adaptation, regardless of the expatriate’s country of origin (Neupert et al., 2005; Yamazaki, 2010). Rather than focusing solely on locally stationed expatriates, their study explored the cross-cultural competencies of Chinese managers operating in various global contexts. Hence, the study offers a comparative analysis of cross-cultural skills among foreign managers in various global regions. The results of the study showed that there are significant cultural and institutional

differences between China and developed countries in Europe and the US, so Chinese expatriates working in developed countries may need to put in more effort to develop cultural and institutional differences, perceptual and communication skills, and to find a work-life balance. And compared with expatriates from developed countries in Europe and the United States, Chinese expatriates in Africa require greater self-sufficiency to cope with the relatively harsh working conditions. However, these Chinese expatriates may similarly transfer various skills honed in China's complex and opaque business environment to these countries (Morck et al., 2008). Thus, Chinese expatriates may find it easier to transfer their Guanxi cultural skills and workplace cultural backgrounds to African countries, given the less developed cultural backgrounds in these regions. A clear comparison reveals that the communication methods and techniques of Chinese expatriates and local employees vary across local cultural contexts. However, given their own cultural background and the local cultural context, it is worth considering how Chinese expatriate employees incorporate Guanxi into a cross-cultural environment.

Most studies appear to focus on expatriates from North America and Western Europe, particularly those from developed countries (Yamazaki, 2010; Dabic et al., 2015), and there is relatively limited research on expatriates from developing countries (Wang et al., 2013). So, the literature on Chinese expatriates is relatively new and sparse (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Zhong et al. (2021) conducted interviews with Chinese expatriates, including senior executives and middle managers in several multinational enterprises, to address this gap. However, they also acknowledged that there remains a lack of clear understanding regarding the management and development of Chinese expatriates. This imbalance highlights the need for further research on the unique challenges and practices faced by expatriates from China.

As this section shows, Chinese expatriates bring distinctive cultural values, relational norms, and organizational practices to international workplaces. Advancing research on Chinese expatriates, especially self-initiated expatriates, can deepen the theoretical understanding of this unique group of global workers. In addition, such research can help build more comprehensive

theories about self-initiated expatriation. These studies offer practical insights into talent management and intercultural collaboration, all from a distinctly Chinese perspective.

1.2 Immigrant Adjustment Studies

1.2.1 General Concepts of Acculturation

People today live in a global era characterized by increasing international mobility, immigration, and cross-cultural contact (Sam and Berry, 2010; Roskrug and Poot, 2024). Migrating to different countries, people drift and collide between two different cultures, also bringing with them a very different world view and culture into another world full of uncertainty and unfamiliarity. Over the past few decades, Western countries such as Europe and the Americas have become destinations for large-scale immigration, and in many countries around the world, immigrants have long existed and are even in their third or even fourth generation, thereby contributing to the world's continuing super-diversity (Vertovec, 2013; Spoonley, 2014). In Germany, the second generation of immigrants increasingly participates in broader sociocultural life compared with their parents (Giovani and Akdede, 2023). In highly diverse European cities, such as Berlin and Paris, migrants continue to negotiate belonging, identity, and social attachment (Barwick and Beaman, 2019). These facts illustrate immigrant communities and contribute to global super-diversity dynamics. To better understand the different norms and values of culture, people are faced with many questions about identity, adaptation, and intercultural relations.

One of the most influential theories on immigrant adaptation is acculturation. Acculturation is one of the big problems faced by immigrants (Berry, 1997, 2003; Kim, 2007; Jian, 2012). Acculturation is a field that has been studied by scholars since the 1930s and is widely used in psychology and management, with a focus on refugees, asylum seekers, sojourners, immigrants, expatriates, and indigenous and so-called ethnic minorities (Sam and Berry, 2010).

The earliest widely cited definition of acculturation came from Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936): "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups

of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Elhami and Roshan, 2024, p.182). Later, the Social Science Research Council (1954) defined it as “culture change initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors” (p.974).

Over decades of research on the definition of acculturation, it is clear that both expatriates and host-country employees have distinct cultural traits, social thinking, and lifestyles. Acculturation involves two directions: sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Sociocultural adaptation refers to the ability to deal with daily life problems and social interactions in a new cultural context, whereas psychological adaptation refers to a range of psychological outcomes associated with personal and cultural identity, subjective well-being, and emotional satisfaction in a new cultural environment (Ward and Kennedy, 1994, 1999). Thus, sociocultural and psychological changes can be directly observed across various areas, including people’s attitudes, behavior, values, cultural identity, and self-awareness.

While interdisciplinary research has traditionally focused on the attitudes and acculturation strategies of minority groups such as immigrants and expatriates, scholars have increasingly emphasized that the attitudes of the host society are equally important for both the process and outcomes of acculturation (Bourhis et al., 1997a; van Oudenhoven et al., 1998; Kunst et al., 2021). Over time, interdisciplinary researchers have conducted a range of studies and refined the definition of acculturation. In 1964, Gordon proposed a unidimensional model to describe the cultural changes immigrants experience. The unidimensional model focuses on immigrants, arguing that the culture they experience is a bipolar continuum in which one side maintains its traditional culture and the other adopts the host country’s culture. Immigrants are moving back and forth between these two poles, with the midpoint of this bipolarity being biculturalism: the preservation of one’s own traditional culture while adopting key elements of the host country’s

culture. As Bourhis et al. (1997) note, “for decades, unidimensional models have been the primary framework for migration adaptation” (p.376).

However, the unidimensional model continues to argue that full acceptance of the host culture is the most successful assimilation. In this view, individuals are expected to abandon the attitudes, values, and behaviors of their culture of origin while adopting those of the dominant society (Gordon, 1964; Gans, 1979). Yet, the limitations of the unidimensional assimilation model are increasingly apparent. Taft (1953) argues that the host society is gradually changing as immigrants join society and become participants in social networks. Verdugo and Swanson (2022) partially acknowledge Taft’s theory, recognizing its contribution to the development of assimilation. On this basis, they emphasize that assimilation is not a one-way process but rather a dialectical and interactive one. Both immigrants and host societies undergo mutual transformation through social participation and shared networks.

In response to these limitations, the bidimensional model has gradually developed, the main difference between the two models being how they allow the relationship between national culture and dominant culture to be dealt with. The bidimensional model refers to the own heritage culture and the host society culture that should be assessed separately. The earliest investigation into Bidimensional Models was Berry (1974, 1992), who conceptualized the development of migrant and host identities as distinct processes evolving along orthogonal dimensions.

1.2.2 Berry’s Acculturation Model

Presented by Berry (1994, 1997), the acculturation model describes a process of cultural change as individuals interact with and adapt to another culture. This process includes learning, developing, and adapting to new cultures and facing new challenges (Berry, 2006; Tadmor et al., 2009). Attitudes and behaviors of cultural groups can shape immigrants’ acculturation strategies (Berry, 2001). During acculturation, original cultural patterns of several groups gradually change, yet these groups keep their own identities and remain distinct.

Berry is widely recognized as a pioneer of acculturation research (Ward, 2008). Building upon his earlier conceptualization, Berry (1997) advanced the bidimensional model of acculturation, which assesses acculturation along two independent dimensions: (a) striving to extend the heritage identity, (b) the desire to be involved in the dominant culture. Based on these dimensions, Berry identified four distinct acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation. The model is frequently used in various types of research on immigrants, refugees, and expatriates, and continues to serve as one of the most influential frameworks for understanding intercultural adaptation, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Acculturation Model

Dimension 2: the desire to be involved in the dominant culture	Dimension 1: striving to extend the heritage identity	
	Maintain	Refuse
YES	Integration	Assimilation
NO	Separation	Marginalization

Source: Berry (1997)

From the perspective of non-dominant groups, individuals who reject their original culture and fully integrate into the host country pursue an assimilation strategy. Those who strongly preserve their culture and avoid engaging with the host culture follow a separation strategy. Individuals who maintain their cultural identity while building positive ties with the host society pursue an integration strategy. Marginalization occurs when individuals lose connection with their heritage and fail to form meaningful ties with the host culture (Lu et al., 2011).

In the hierarchical model of acculturation levels, assimilation and integration are considered higher levels of acculturation because non-dominant groups share a common identity with the dominant group while still distinguishing themselves in positive ways (Gaertner et al., 2015). In addition, integration is the most appropriate acculturation strategy from the perspective of the non-dominant group in other cultures. It enables individuals to build better relations with the dominant culture while maintaining their own heritage identity and is associated with positive psychological and sociocultural outcomes (Zagefka and Brown, 2002; Berry et al.,

2006; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007). It was also Berry and colleagues who argued that the integration strategy was effective in helping individuals minimize stress and be more easily accepted into mainstream society (Berry and Kim, 1989). At the same time, individuals can add new behaviors learned from the intercultural environment to their individual heritage culture (Berry, 2005).

Consequently, the integration strategy is therefore the preferred strategy according to many scholars and is seen as the most adaptive option for both dominant and non-dominant groups, with the best results in terms of individual psychological and sociocultural aspects (Berry, 1997, 2005, 2008; Berry et al., 2006; Kosic et al., 2006; Scottham and Dias, 2010; Ward and Leong, 2006; Berry and Sabatier, 2010). But this perfect strategy is not actually easy to achieve (Bourhis et al., 1997). Therefore, it is also argued that from the perspective of the dominant group, they prefer the non-dominant group to adopt the dominant culture of the host country rather than to maintain their traditional culture of their country of origin, and the dominant group wants the non-dominant group to adopt the strategy of assimilation (van Oudenhoven et al., 1998; Arends and Vijver, 2003). The remaining two strategies: separation and marginalization as lower acculturation levels (Berry, 1997), especially marginalization with its negative orientations on both the culture maintenance and contact dimensions, are likely to produce the worst acculturative results (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation problems in the workplace can reduce expatriates' productivity and challenge organizational functioning (Vianen and Pater, 2004; Raville, 2006). Such challenges often lead to lower job performance and diminished job satisfaction. Without adopting higher-level acculturation strategies, these problems are likely to undermine intercultural workplace relationships as well.

In retrospect, Berry's acculturation model, originally developed and tested among ethnically heterogeneous groups in Canada, has since been applied across various racial contexts in the United States, providing additional evidence for refining the theory (Lu et al., 2011). However, it is important to recognize that acculturation patterns may vary considerably across countries and regions (Bourhis et al., 1997).

Because of this, determining the appropriate acculturation patterns for immigrants remains a question. Drawing on Berry's model, it can be observed that, among the four categories, integration or assimilation is the preferred acculturation pattern for expatriates. In the past few decades, integration and assimilation have been heavily debated. Behind the rapid expansion of theoretical discussions lies a tendency to present migration research as straightforward and accessible, while the methodologies and theoretical frameworks often fail to align with the field's complexity (Schneider and Crul, 2010).

As mentioned above, and reiterated in the preceding text, assimilation assumes that foreigners and non-dominant groups gradually become similar to the dominant society. As a one-way path of immigrant adaptation, it is hoped that immigrant communities can integrate into the local society. Assimilation is considered in research as a measure of immigrants' success in integrating into the economic and social aspects. It even serves as a proven stepping stone in studies of immigration in the United States, examining whether immigrants can successfully integrate into the labor market (Schneider and Crul, 2010).

In addition to assimilation, integration is regarded as the mainstream perspective in European immigration studies (Penninx, 2013; McDonogh, 2019; Alarian and Neureiter, 2021; Dorn and Zweimüller, 2021). The European Union defines integration as a "dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents" (EESC, 2004, p.5). Unlike assimilation, integration emphasizes immigrants' participation in local society. It also acknowledges the preservation of their ethnic and cultural identities. These two acculturation patterns are primarily used to analyze the acculturation of "classical" migrants. This term refers to immigrants, expatriates, and refugees entering environments dominated by a culture associated with the white majority population. The aim is to explore whether the incoming population can fully adapt to the dominant white group's culture. It also considers if they can collaborate with the white population to create a new environment (Karimi and Wilkes, 2024).

Further analysis reveals that these two terms reflect distinct approaches and strategies in the United States and Europe as they respond to rapidly changing immigration patterns. The emphasis on integration and assimilation suggests these concepts are becoming paradigms. Yet,

they have faced increasing criticism from scholars in recent years (Spencer and Charsley, 2021; Favell, 2022; Grzymala-Kazłowska and Ryan, 2022). Many argue that this framework is no longer enough to capture the complexity of contemporary immigrant settlement processes (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore, 2018). Meissner and Vertovec (2015) also suggest that much of immigration research remains focused on specific ethnic groups. It heavily relies on Berry's bidimensional model of acculturation. However, growing diversity in migration flows has prompted scholars to call for moving beyond ethnic-centered frameworks when studying immigrants and host societies (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). This shift reflects an increasing reality of super-diversity, marked by heightened global mobility and transnationalism. Ongoing changes continue to challenge established theories and methodologies.

1.2.3 Superdiversity in the Workplace

Super-diversity in immigration has emerged as a global phenomenon, a concept introduced by Vertovec (2013). Originally, the term described the growing presence of new immigrants in London, characterized by small numbers, dispersion, multiple origins, transnational connections, and a complexity surpassing previous UK immigration environments. This environment's impact is clear in the growing racial and national diversity immigrants bring, continually reshaping residential and settlement patterns.

Therefore, it is insufficient to examine immigration solely through racial or ethnic distinctions. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, it is necessary to consider multiple dimensions. These include diverse immigrant identities, the rights and limitations they experience, variations in labor-market participation, gender and age distributions, spatial settlement patterns, and the responses of local populations (Vertovec, 2013). Ultimately, the true essence of "super-diversity" lies in the combined impact of these intersecting factors.

Currently, immigration research tends to focus on the integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization of specific racial or ethnic groups in destination countries. However, few scholars examine immigrants through a lens that incorporates diverse factors, individual

experiences, varied backgrounds, and the levels of heterogeneity, complexity, and fluidity that now define this reality (Goodson and Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015).

Vertovec (2010) argues that over the past two decades, the UK and other European countries have entered the era of superdiversity, where increased mobility continues to shape new demographic patterns in European cities. The accession of Poland to the EU has accelerated the growth of metropolitan spaces and the influx of immigrants, undoubtedly steering Poland's immigration landscape towards superdiversity. Therefore, superdiversity can no longer be confined to a descriptive term; rather, it captures the ever-changing demographic reality and continuously guides and inspires new ways of thinking and theoretical frameworks for understanding society (Goodson and Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2015).

Under the influence of immigration superdiversity, the demographic composition within urban areas has become more complex than before. The workplace environment, encompassing culture, profession, race, and language, is also becoming more diverse as it attracts employees from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Fundamentally, workplace diversity is determined by both locals and expatriates. Consequently, coworkers in cross-cultural workplaces have varied values and ethnic backgrounds. Superdiversity, therefore, highlights not only differences between ethnic groups but also heterogeneity within the same group (Crul, 2016). Migrants bring new social networks, experiences, and entrepreneurial knowledge and serve as bridges to foreign investors in the workplace. They utilize their experiences in their home countries to connect with foreign employees, creating new overseas markets and diverse multicultural work environments (Rana and Elo, 2017).

Therefore, the concept of superdiversity enables researchers to consider both the broad and dynamic characteristics of expatriates. These include country of origin, ethnicity, culture, and language, as well as migration channels, employment opportunities, and forms of human capital (Lee et al., 2019). This framework facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of expatriates' immigration trends and experiences, encompassing their integration into the local environment and the inequalities, biases, and social isolation they may encounter.

1.2.4 Differentiated Embedding

In recent years, the process through which immigrants integrate into both local and transnational social networks has attracted increasing scholarly attention. The traditional term of “integration” has been criticized for being overly simplistic and normalized. Especially Dahinden (2016) notes that more scholars now challenge the “nation-state- and ethnicity-centered epistemology” (p.2207) that has historically shaped immigration research. In response to these criticisms, a range of alternative conceptual frameworks have emerged to better capture the complexity of immigration processes.

Grzymala-Kazłowska and Ryan (2022), drawing on the concepts of White and Grabowska (2019), argue that immigration should be viewed not only as integration into the receiving society, but also as an ongoing process of learning, developing new competences and practices, and continuously adapting to evolving contexts and social environments. Building on this perspective, Ryan (2017) introduced the concept of differentiated embedding, inspired by Granovetter’s (1985) theory of embeddedness and emphasizing the individual-level embedding of economic behavior within concrete systems of relationships and structures.

According to Korinek, Entwisle, and Jampaklay (2005), embeddedness is defined as “social relationships that foster a sense of rootedness and integration” (p.780), and such features are among the most influential factors shaping migrant settlement, onward movement, or return. In general, embeddedness seeks to promote a sense of rootedness and better integration into the local environment through social relationships (Ryan, 2018). However, across the literature, embeddedness often implies a static, already achieved state.

Therefore, Ryan and Mulholland (2014, 2015) introduced the concept of differentiated embedding to help people understand the dynamic processes through which immigrants establish social relationships, form attachments to specific groups across different life domains, and acquire dynamic resources. As Habti (2021) notes, this approach offers a fresh lens for understanding migration. Differentiated embedding thus emphasizes the individualized and transformative nature of migrants’ experiences, whereby lived experiences keep individuals connected to specific places and communities (Andrejuk and Winiarska, 2020).

Differentiated embedding, as a way of capturing migrants' complex, dynamic, and multidimensional processes of belonging and attachment over time, was suggested as a more dynamic and even reversible process (Ryan, 2017). Central to this framework are the concepts of attachment and belonging. Belonging is understood as a sense of emotional, relational, and symbolic connectedness to a place or group, while attachment refers to the development of deeper ties and commitments that bind individuals to particular people, institutions, or spaces (Ryan, 2018).

Rather than assuming migrants uniformly integrate into the host society, the theory of differentiated embedding acknowledges that individuals may develop attachments in some domains while remaining detached in others. For instance, migrants may feel strongly attached to workplace relationships yet remain socially distant from their neighborhoods or the broader host society (Ryan, 2017). Ryan (2018) describes how some migrants remain embedded primarily in co-ethnic "bubbles", maintaining emotional ties within their own communities while engaging only minimally with the local community. Mulholland and Ryan (2022) further suggest that differentiated embedding may involve more implicit dimensions. For example, over time, immigrants may develop a sense of belonging and attachment to specific environments, which may not align with their original plans. Achieving this requires ongoing work, time, energy, and commitment.

This framework highlights the gradual, uneven, and sometimes inconsistent nature of migrants' efforts to build connections, access resources, and develop attachments across multiple life domains (Habti, 2021). Ryan (2018) and Habti (2021) identify three key dynamisms of differentiated embedding:

1. Relational embedding highlights the quality and depth of interpersonal ties, including friendship, trust, and emotional support.
2. Spatial embedding captures the extent of migrants' participation in both formal and informal social spaces, such as workplaces, communities, and public gatherings.
3. Temporal embedding emphasizes how migrants' sense of belonging and connectedness evolves over time, shaped by career trajectories, life events, and accumulated experiences.

Together, these dynamisms illustrate that embedding is not a uniform or static process but a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon.

The theory of differentiated embedding aims to overcome the simplistic view that immigrants can simply integrate, instead shedding light on the complex experiences immigrants have within different social relationships. Ryan (2018) further illustrates that embedding is partial and often domain specific. For example, migrants may feel embedded in their professional environment while remaining disconnected from their neighborhood or the broader host society. Interpersonal relationships, in particular, are crucial for embedding (Ryan, 2018). Consequently, social connections with coworkers can either support or hinder the formation of a sense of belonging within specific social spaces.

The impact of workplace internal networks is well documented (Cole et al., 2002; Bennett et al., 2010; Bruque et al., 2016). Coworkers' social networks are among the important conditions for ongoing experiences of belonging and attachment. The development of social relationships can help self-initiated expatriates gain and use various resources within and beyond the workplace, thereby enhancing their ability to navigate life in a new environment (Barglowski and Bonfert, 2023). Informal coworker relationships also serve as important sources of social support and friendship (Morrison and Cooper-Thomas, 2017). As high-skilled migrants, self-initiated expatriates often establish non-instrumental relationships with colleagues and engage in social activities to foster genuine, intimate friendships (Habti, 2021). Positive experiences can facilitate the embedding of self-initiated expatriates, fostering close relationships in social networks, enhancing well-being, cultivating a sense of belonging, and enabling them to gain social capital, mobility, self-confidence, skills, and knowledge (Suutari et al., 2018; Bastida et al., 2024). Conversely, this process is reversible, as they may have negative experiences in the local community, such as evident racial categorization or difficulties feeling a sense of belonging in a cross-cultural work environment due to a lack of cultural and racial-related experiences (Habti and Koikkalainen, 2014).

As noted by Ryan (2018), the differentiated embedding of self-initiated expatriates is a multi-dimensional process that unfolds across various levels. Building on this framework,

differentiated embedding offers a valuable lens for analyzing how Chinese self-initiated expatriates cultivate relationships within different workplace domains. Specifically, it highlights not only the specific arenas and pathways through which they become embedded, but also the challenges they face and the underlying factors that shape these processes.

1.3 Coworker Relationship Studies

1.3.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory is a foundational paradigm recognized for its insights into workplace relationships. It provides a framework for organizational scholars to explain workplace interpersonal behavior (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). The theory describes interdependent exchanges: when one coworker provides a valuable resource, the other feels obligated to reciprocate, either positively or negatively. Through such exchanges, mutual relationships are formed (Blau, 1964).

In the workplace, communication and interaction among coworkers are interconnected rather than isolated. Communication underpins relationship-building at work, and reciprocal interactions can create high-quality relationships (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) because mutually beneficial exchange fosters loyalty, trust, and commitment (Mitchell, Cropanzano, and Quisenberry, 2012). Thus, social exchange theory remains an enduring and widely applied perspective in management studies (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Cropanzano et al. (2017) observe that critical themes in organizational behavior have been explored through this theory. For instance, organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1994), organizational commitment (Bishop et al., 2000), and perceptions of support and conscientiousness (Ladd and Henry, 2000) have all been effectively examined within this framework.

The initial premise of social exchange theory was that interpersonal relationships are formed through a subjective cost-benefit analysis. According to this theory, people tend to repeat behaviors that have been rewarded in the past, and the more rewards a particular behavior has received, the more likely it is to be repeated (Homans, 1958). Blau (1964) argues that social

exchange requires a sense of obligation: when one person offers help to another, the party offering the help expects something in return in the future, but the timing and form of this return are unclear. Therefore, he further divided the exchange relationship between individuals into economic and social exchanges, where economic exchange refers to short-term exchanges involving weaker, more economic interpersonal relationships. Social exchange relationships are more long-term and open, and are associated with stronger interpersonal relationships that require less from the individual in return and imply a more generous exchange of benefits. In general, economic exchange emphasizes financial ties or other specific aspects of the exchange, whereas social exchange occurs in a more specific and symbolic way (Shore et al., 2006).

A wide body of research has validated the theoretical propositions of Social Exchange Theory. For example, high-quality social exchanges have been shown to reduce interpersonal conflict and enhance cohesion within teams (Abu and Sheer, 2013), lower the incidence of workplace bullying (Parzefall and Salin, 2010), promote reciprocal work behavior and knowledge sharing (Liang et al., 2008), and increase job engagement and ultimately improve job performance (Yin, 2018). Even as workplace dynamics continue to evolve with increasing diversity, coworkers continue to seek out and maintain reciprocal, trusting relationships that reflect the core principles of high-quality social exchange (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018).

Over time, Social Exchange Theory has developed into a constellation of conceptual models that build upon its foundational principles. Two prominent extensions are the Coworker Exchange Quality model (Sherony and Green, 2002) and the High-Quality Connections framework (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Although these models have been applied less frequently in cross-cultural research, they offer valuable perspectives for analyzing the quality and dynamics of coworker relationships in increasingly diverse, multicultural work environments.

1.3.2 Coworker Exchange Quality

Scholars consistently emphasize the importance of individual differences in the workplace, given the critical role of coworker relationships (Judge et al., 2002; Orvis et al., 2008).

Coworkers influence employees more than supervisors, especially regarding perceptions, attitudes, OCBs, and performance (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Pelin and Osoian, 2021). Within organizations, individuals are socially and functionally interconnected, forming coworker networks that act as both social partners and task collaborators.

Sherony and Green (2002) note that high-quality coworker relationships involve mutual respect, trust, and obligation, which can generate many benefits. Halbesleben (2017) defines positive coworker exchange as a process in which employees build trust and support one another through resource sharing. Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1988, 1998, 2001), these exchanges enhance satisfaction, engagement, and performance, creating cycles of collaboration and resource gain.

Employees with a high-quality coworker relationship may be more likely to develop friendships with coworkers through daily interactions, gradually forming strong emotional ties. Over time, these connections can yield various benefits tied to the quality of the bond. According to the theoretical premise of social exchange theory, positive relationships among coworkers are expected to yield rewards. Consequently, in building a positive coworker exchange relationship, employees with valuable resources can invest them in their coworkers to obtain better resources, creating a virtuous cycle of resources (Hobfoll, 2001). One result of this cycle can include beneficial knowledge sharing between coworkers (Santoso et al., 2020). Turning to multicultural contexts, it is important to note that members working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds become a major driver of team creativity. This effect stems from increased exposure to different cultural perspectives, which can add new ways of thinking and reduce collective bias (De Dreu and West, 2001; Homan et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2019). However, multiculturalism is often a double-edged sword in coworker relationships; in intercultural contexts, members may feel more aligned with their own international subgroup and remain reserved toward others (van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Homan et al., 2007, 2015). This challenge highlights difficulties in communication and relationship building among cross-cultural colleagues. Thus, while multiculturalism may influence the quality of coworker exchange relationships, how it does so remain unclear. As a result, research on coworker

exchange has largely focused on monocultural contexts, with limited examination of how high-quality coworker relationships can be effectively facilitated in cross-cultural workplaces.

1.3.3 High-Quality Connections

Cited from Dutton and Heaphy (2003), “high-quality connections (HQCs) are short-term interactions or enduring relationships characterized by vitality, mutuality, and positive regard” (p.10). Many scholars have further conceptualized positive workplace relationships as high-quality connections (Heaphy, 2003; Higgins, 2003; Quinn, 2003; Baker and Dutton, 2003), emphasizing that they constitute the fundamental building blocks of positive organizational dynamics.

Building on these insights, Ragins and Dutton (2017) conceptualized positive workplace relationships as a new interdisciplinary field of study that analyzes the processes that generate positive relationships at work, the mechanisms of these relationships, and the positive outcomes. Furthermore, coworkers who find themselves in high-quality connections also experience feelings of vitality and aliveness; they are more likely to feel positive arousal and a heightened sense of positive energy (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003; Quinn and Dutton, 2005).

According to the theory, high-quality connections have three main characteristics: higher emotional carrying capacity, tensility, and a higher degree of connectivity. A higher emotional carrying capacity of a connection is evidenced by people’s ability to express their emotions, whether positive or negative (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Tensility is the “capacity of the connection to bend and withstand strain and function in various circumstances” (p.266), which means the ability to resist, recover, and function in various situations in the face of difficulty and stress. Degree of connectivity is a measure of a relationship’s “generativity and openness to new ideas and influence, and its ability to deflect behaviors that will shut down generative processes” (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003, p.266). A team with high emotional carrying capacity can encourage employees in the workplace to express both positive and negative emotions more freely, thereby enhancing both individual and collective resilience and enabling recovery from setbacks. (Stephens et al., 2013). Tensility strength is influenced by the level of emotional

carrying capacity (Stephens et al., 2013). Also, Losada and Heaphy (2004) found that teams with a higher degree of connectivity are more likely to have a relaxed organizational climate, creating a valuable emotional space for positive action and innovation. Furthermore, three essential subjective feelings that people in high-quality relationships have include:

1. Feeling of vitality and aliveness. People in high-quality connections are more likely to feel positive arousal and a heightened sense of positive energy (Quinn and Dutton, 2005).
2. Feeling of positive regard. People in high-quality connections can feel being known, being taken care and being loved. This feeling can be described as a state of pure being in which “worries, vanities, and desires vanish” (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003, p.267).
3. Feeling of mutuality. Mutuality captures the sense that both people in a connection are engaged and actively participating (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003), people feel mutuality is the perception of shared vulnerability, openness, and participation in the organization.

Vitality and aliveness, positive regard, and mutuality form the prism through which high-quality connections are observed.

Overall, positive relationships offer a more nuanced understanding of coworkers’ subjective experiences, encompassing both their behaviors and emotions. Research by Basford and Offermann (2012) indicates that positive relationships with colleagues independently enhance employees’ enthusiasm and willingness, surpassing even the support provided by supervisors. Colleague relationships have a greater impact on employees’ willingness to stay, and organizations that foster positive relationships report higher motivation across all levels of employees. Positive relationships also enhance employee well-being and productivity (de Tormes, Eby, and Allen, 2012). These relationships shape individual development, foster friendships, and facilitate the sharing of career-related opportunities. Employees are more inclined to provide emotional support to coworkers, assist one another in career development, and share knowledge relevant to project needs (Colbert et al., 2016; Caillier, 2017; Hanafin et al., 2022). Maintaining positive relationships with coworkers can also enhance employees’ sense of belonging and facilitate better workplace integration (Randel, A. E., and Ranft, A. L., 2007).

Despite the evident importance of positive collegial relationships, there is limited literature addressing how such relationships are built and maintained in cross-cultural workplaces. In this context, Morris et al. (2008) reviewed attitudes and approaches to employee relationships among Chinese employees in cross-cultural settings. They investigated coworker networks in a global retail bank across China, the United States, Germany, and Spain. Their study suggests that different cultural backgrounds and norms can lead to unique interactions and approaches to coworker relationships, with implications for employee attitudes and work behaviors. Building on these findings, scholars have noted that Chinese employees tend to value an ordered hierarchy and may be more inclined to invest energy in cultivating relationships with their superiors rather than with their coworkers, sometimes even beyond the workplace (Morris et al., 2008). However, the study did not explore the cultural construct of Guanxi, which is a fundamental element of Chinese workplace culture that often leads to coworker relationships extending into non-work spheres.

Regarding workplace dynamics within Polish cultural contexts, a study of Polish immigrant employees in the Finnish workplace found that they were willing to build trusting relationships in the intercultural workplace. However, they believe trust is based on good interpersonal relationships and develops through interpersonal intimacy. Polish employees want workplace relationships to extend beyond work (Lahti and Valo, 2013). This suggests similarities may exist in the behavioral practices of Chinese and Polish employees in the workplace. The exact manifestations and mechanisms by which they establish positive collegial relationships remain unknown.

In contrast to the classical social exchange theory of reciprocal resource exchange and the coworker exchange theory of mutual respect, trust, and obligation, the concept of high-quality connections offers more specific dimensions. These can be explored at both behavioral and perceptual levels. This theory reflects characteristics of positive relationships and defines them in terms of expatriates' subjective experiences. Therefore, individuals' perceptions and views of relationship quality are crucial for achieving optimal organizational outcomes. Relationships are culturally embedded (Gergen, 2009). This is especially true during cross-cultural

interactions between individuals from different ethnic cultures. The development trends, whether positive or negative, depend on the individual (Sias, 2008; Thomas and Inkson, 2017).

After reviewing the various research on coworker relationships, as Glińska-Noweś (2017) notes, “as positive relationships at work (PRW) are concerned by different disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, management) and on different levels (individual, team, organization), there is no single ‘best’ definition reflecting absolute consensus” (p.88). Building on this multidimensional understanding, Lis et al. (2015) followed the perspective of Dutton and Heaphy (2003), who conceptualize positive relationships as high-quality connections. Such connections are “life-giving, characterized by elasticity, strength, resilience, and vitality”; conversely, corrosive connections are “life-depleting and destructive”, undermining both individual well-being and organizational functioning (Lis et al., 2015, p.32). Given the conceptual advances offered by the high-quality connection framework and the complexity of intercultural workplaces, this study also adopts high-quality connections as a key criterion for evaluating the development of positive relationships between Chinese and Polish employees.

1.3.4 Guanxi in the Chinese Context

The presence of a strong, specific element of Guanxi in Chinese culture is evident in the literature of both the social sciences and the business disciplines. In China, Guanxi serves as a resilient mechanism for dealing with highly personal issues and maintaining an invisible social order. It is difficult to define and capture thoroughly, but its importance remains with the Chinese throughout their lives. As Chen and Bedford (2021) explain, guanxi refers to personal dyadic ties governed by interaction norms grounded in Confucian ethics.

Deeply rooted in Chinese national culture, Guanxi operates through unique mechanisms for relationship building and maintenance that differ markedly from those in Western contexts. Scholars are increasingly comparing Western relationship theory with the concept of Guanxi in Chinese culture to better understand its nature and implications (Lee et al., 2001). For example, Western systems typically rely on formal contracts to initiate and manage professional relationships, whereas Chinese practices often prioritize cultivating social bonds prior to

formalizing agreements (Berger et al., 2015). This practice may lead Chinese employees to extend this behavior into relationships with cross-cultural coworkers, blurring established boundaries and regulations to pursue better development prospects.

Scholars also argued that Guanxi is a form of social capital that relies on exchange values embedded in relationships, such as potential resources and opportunities, rather than on the amount of cumulative guanxi (Warren et al., 2004). There is a theoretical overlap between the concept of Guanxi and social exchange theory, which holds that the strength of Guanxi is maintained through the exchange of appropriate favors, coupled with personal displays of concern. For this reason, Guanxi is a topic of organizational studies in China and is often used by the Chinese to address highly personal problems that cannot be clearly articulated and to navigate the changing social order (Alston, 1989). Peng (2005) notes that while Chinese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships and conformity to social norms, this does not mean that individuality is completely disregarded. Instead, individuality is viewed in relation to the larger group or system in which the individual operates. This is sometimes referred to as the collectivist nature of Chinese culture, where the group takes precedence over the individual. However, this does not mean that individuality is completely suppressed or ignored. Rather, it is viewed as existing in relation to and in balance with the needs of the larger group or system. For this reason, most organizations in China have a family dimension, focusing on staff dedication, the creation of family bonds among employees, and harmony among them.

Within this cultural framework, Chen et al. (2012) proposed that Coworker Guanxi is the degree of trust and emotional closeness between coworkers, and that the stronger the Guanxi, the more homogeneous the information and the more frequent the interactions between participants. Not surprisingly, Guanxi exists in the Chinese work environment and becomes a crucial prerequisite for information and business exchanges. Relationships benefit the whole organization, and Guanxi is present in high-quality relationships and promotes additional performance (Luo et al., 2016).

The process and theoretical models for the creation, maintenance and use of Guanxi are currently covered extensively at both the individual and organizational levels (Mao et al., 2012,

Chen et al., 2014), including but not limited to Guanxi as alternative institutional support (Xin and Pearce, 1996), and to overcome institutional barriers (Luo et al., 2012); the dispositional antecedents of Guanxi and the mediating role for job satisfaction (Zhai et al., 2013); positive impact of coworker Guanxi on job performance (Xie et al., 2021).

However, much of the empirical research has relied on ad hoc measures of Guanxi, often tailored to specific research contexts (Mavondo and Rodrigo, 2001; Chen and Bedford, 2021). In response, scholars have increasingly advocated for more culturally grounded, multidimensional instruments. For instance, Lee and Dawes (2005) called for measures developed directly from Chinese cultural perspectives. Following this approach, Yen et al. (2011) developed a three-dimensional Guanxi structure that includes three Chinese terms: Ganqing (emotional bonding), Renqing (norms of reciprocity), and Xinren (trustworthiness), to examine the mediating role of Guanxi in fostering positive workplace relationships.

First, Ganqing, which can be translated as feelings, refers to emotional bonding and the degree to which individuals can share their joys and fears with one another. Relationships with strong Ganqing foster loyalty, solidarity, and a willingness to look out for each other in all situations (Chen and Chen, 2004). Extending this relational perspective to the workplace, Lewicka et al. (2018) demonstrate that employee loyalty involves not only commitment to the organization but also to co-workers. Accordingly, Ganqing can be understood as the emotional dimension of Guanxi (Chen and Chen, 2004). A higher level of Ganqing contributes to the development of long-term, stable loyalty relationships and facilitates the formation of positive interpersonal relationships.

Second, Renqing is the conative component of the relationship (Berger et al., 2015). It means sensuality, human compassion and kindness, favoritism, and gift-giving. In the practice of Guanxi, it refers to a humane obligation, such as the mutual favoring of resources between individuals, and is used to tighten the bonds between parties (Wong and Leung, 2001). To make it easier to understand this term, scholars like to link Renqing in the Chinese context to owing a favor in the Western context, arguing that the two are similar (Yen et al., 2011). Therefore, in a relationship, accepting a favor is equivalent to owing Renqing, and one should be prepared to

repay more in the future to maintain a healthy Guanxi. The more appropriate amount of Renqing is exchanged, the better and closer the relationship will be, but scholars believe that mastering Renqing thoroughly is a complex art, and if misused, it could be seen as bribery, while too little use could be seen as petty and unreasonable (Berger and Herstein, 2012). In this study, the relationship between Renqing and mutuality in high-quality connections will be explored.

Last, Xinren, which can be translated as trust, plays a cognitive role in Guanxi and can be used to measure a person's reliability and authenticity, reflecting the level of trustworthiness of the individual in a relationship (Kriz and Fang, 2003). Also, for coworkers within the same profession, building mutual trust is essential for sustaining effective and stable working relationships (Lewicka, 2015). Therefore, in a Guanxi relationship, one should trust a person who has Xinren. Xinren has a significant impact and can also be seen as a critical intangible asset of a person (Standifird and Marshall, 2000; Kriz, 2002). Based on these three dimensions, this study will specifically examine the influence of Xinren and other Guanxi factors on relationship quality in the Sino-Polish workplace context.

Guo et al. (2018) argue that expatriates with stronger relational skills are better equipped to integrate into the host work environment, as these skills facilitate smoother interpersonal interactions and foster mutual understanding with local employees. Guanxi is seen as a necessary skill in the Chinese context, and several studies have explored Guanxi as a moderating factor in relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Cheung and Wu, 2011) and business partnerships between China and the US (Yen et al., 2016). To date, no literature has specifically examined the application of Guanxi in Sino-Polish workplaces, nor has it explored how these relational dynamics affect both Chinese and Polish employees. Therefore, this study uses Guanxi as a factor to explore its role in building positive relationships between Chinese and Polish employees.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

Following the introduction to the research in the preceding chapters and a comprehensive review of relevant literature in Chapter 2, the primary objective of this chapter is to present the theoretical research model and methodological approach employed to address the research questions. The selection and implementation of research methods constitute the central focus of this chapter.

Accordingly, this chapter will elaborate on the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study, outlining its fundamental principles, research design, and procedural steps. It will detail how both quantitative and qualitative methods are integrated and implemented across the two studies. Finally, the chapter discusses the integration of qualitative and quantitative data. This approach aims to provide a deeper understanding of intercultural communication in Sino-Polish workplaces and to offer new perspectives on building positive employee relationships in cross-cultural organizational contexts.

2.1 Research Model

2.1.1 Research Gaps and Research Questions

Building upon the preceding literature review, this study identifies a major gap: the lack of clarity regarding how Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees build positive relationships at the Sino-Polish workplace. While the theory of high-quality connections (HQC) has been well developed and applied in research on positive workplace relations (Lis et al., 2015; Glińska-Noweś, 2017), empirical studies in cross-cultural environments remain scarce. In these unique workplaces, Chinese and Polish employees may show certain behavioral similarities. However, the specific manifestations and formation of positive coworker relationships through interaction have not been sufficiently explored. Additionally, as interpersonal relationships in China are shaped by Guanxi, how both groups perceive and use

relational dynamics to construct, repair, and maintain Sino-Polish workplace relationships remains underexplored.

A further gap concerns how Chinese self-initiated expatriates achieve workplace embedding and develop interactions with local employees. Although scholars widely acknowledge the significant contribution of self-initiated expatriates to the labor market and organizational performance (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013) and emphasize the supportive role of host-country coworkers in expatriates' cultural adjustment (Mahajan and De Silva, 2012; Varma et al., 2016), there remains a lack of comprehensive investigation into how they and local employees achieve mutual cultural adaptation in cross-cultural workplaces. While previous studies have highlighted these supports and the need for mutual adaptation (Toh and DeNisi, 2007; Toh and Srinivas, 2012; Mahajan and De Silva, 2012; Fee and Michailova, 2021), academic attention to how both sides collaboratively build positive and mutually beneficial workplace relationships remains limited.

Recent research on cross-cultural workplaces has shifted beyond ethnicity centered approaches, driven by migration superdiversity (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). The differentiated embedding perspective has been advanced to examine how individuals experience belonging and attachment in intercultural contexts as a relational, spatial, and temporal dynamic (Ryan, 2014). However, no study has examined differentiated embedding processes and interaction mechanisms between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish coworkers in Sino-Polish workplaces.

In addition to these gaps, research on the management and development of Chinese self-initiated expatriates remains limited. Most existing expatriation studies have focused on Western samples or Western expatriates in China, leading to a lack of understanding of the unique challenges and practices faced by Chinese self-initiated expatriates (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Consequently, there is a clear need to advance research on this group by examining their interactions with host-country coworkers and exploring their relational dynamics within cross-cultural workplaces.

Existing empirical studies have demonstrated that high-quality connections not only enhance employees' subjective work experiences but also significantly contribute to overall organizational performance (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Stephens, Heaphy, and Dutton, 2012). Accordingly, this study adopts high-quality connections as a key indicator of positive relationship building in the Sino-Polish workplace. In turn, to comprehensively capture the adaptation and integration of Chinese employees in the workplace, this research identifies attachment feeling and sense of belonging as two key antecedent variables of differentiated embedding. As mentioned earlier, differentiated embedding theory provides an important analytical framework for understanding how individuals' feelings of attachment and belonging are dynamic processes (Grzymała-Każłowska and Ryan, 2022).

In the response to the identified research gaps, this study proposes the following five research questions:

RQ1: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates' workplace attachment and belonging build differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace?

RQ2: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates' workplace attachment, belonging, and differentiated embedding influence positive relationships with Polish coworkers?

RQ3: What role does the Chinese Guanxi play in fostering positive relationships in the Sino-Polish workplace and their links with workplace attachment, belonging, and differentiated embedding?

RQ4: How do Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish coworkers co-construct relational, spatial, and temporal processes of differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace?

RQ5: What forms of high-quality connections emerge between Chinese and Polish employees in the Sino-Polish workplace?

To address the aforementioned research questions, the study adopts an integrated approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods.

Specifically, for the quantitative component (Study 1), hypotheses are proposed regarding the links between expatriates' workplace attachment feelings, sense of belonging, differentiated

embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connections at work. In addition, the qualitative part (Study 2) further extends the inquiry by examining the underlying processes through which these relationships are constructed, experienced, and sustained in the Sino-Polish workplace.

2.1.2 Hypothesis Development for Study 1

Workplace attachment, defined as the ways individuals establish emotional bonds and interpersonal connections with colleagues in professional settings (Untaru et al., 2023), has long been regarded as an important indicator of the quality of workplace relationships and the closeness among colleagues. Understanding employees' attachment styles is crucial for shaping interpersonal dynamics and workplace relational experiences (Gonzalez, 2016; Artar and Erdil, 2023). Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Chinese self-initiated expatriates' attachment feeling positively affects the high-quality connections between them and Polish coworkers.

A sense of belonging in the workplace makes employees feel valued, needed, and supported. They see themselves as important members of the organization (Cockshaw and Shochet, 2010). Levett Jones and Lathlean (2008) describe belonging as a basic human need that shows a desire for acceptance and building relationships at work. Belonging helps people find their place in the team, identify ways to collaborate, and form relationships at work. It supports positive connections and meaningful professional contributions (Dameron, 2004; Coissard et al., 2017). In summary, belonging is the psychological base for embedding, shaping how people see themselves and interact with coworkers. Based on this, the second hypothesis is:

H2: Chinese self-initiated expatriates' sense of belonging positively affects high-quality connections between them and Polish coworkers.

Differentiated embedding reflects the extent to which Chinese self-initiated expatriates establish emotional and relational bonds within the cross-cultural work environment. As Ryan and Mulholland (2015) suggest, "embedding is a useful concept for understanding the connections among actors within different places and across various domains of interaction" (p.13). Differentiated embedding is conceptualized in this study as a higher-order construct

formed through expatriates' attachment and belonging in the workplace, as suggested by Ryan (2017). When these two foundational psychological states are strong, expatriates experience greater clarity about security, inclusion, and relational stability. By focusing on differentiated embedding, this study provides an in-depth analysis of how Chinese employees achieve self-positioning and anchoring within the Sino-Polish workplace. As the core dimensions of differentiated embedding, attachment, and belonging are key antecedents of high-quality connections, they jointly provide the psychological and emotional foundation for employees to build positive relationships and create a safe, stable, and trusting organizational environment. Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Chinese self-initiated expatriates' differentiated embedding, which is shaped by their sense of attachment and belonging, positively affects high-quality connections with Sino-Polish coworkers.

This study incorporates Guanxi, a network dynamic unique to Chinese society, as a key moderating variable. Guanxi strongly shapes social interactions and governance in China. Chen (2001) describes Guanxi as a social art that influences both Chinese and cross-cultural contexts. Recent research (e.g., Dorothy and Ibrahim, 2016) uses Guanxi as a moderator to examine its impact on interpersonal relationships and workplace outcomes. This study positions Guanxi as a moderator between attachment, belonging, differentiated embedding, and high-quality coworker relationships. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

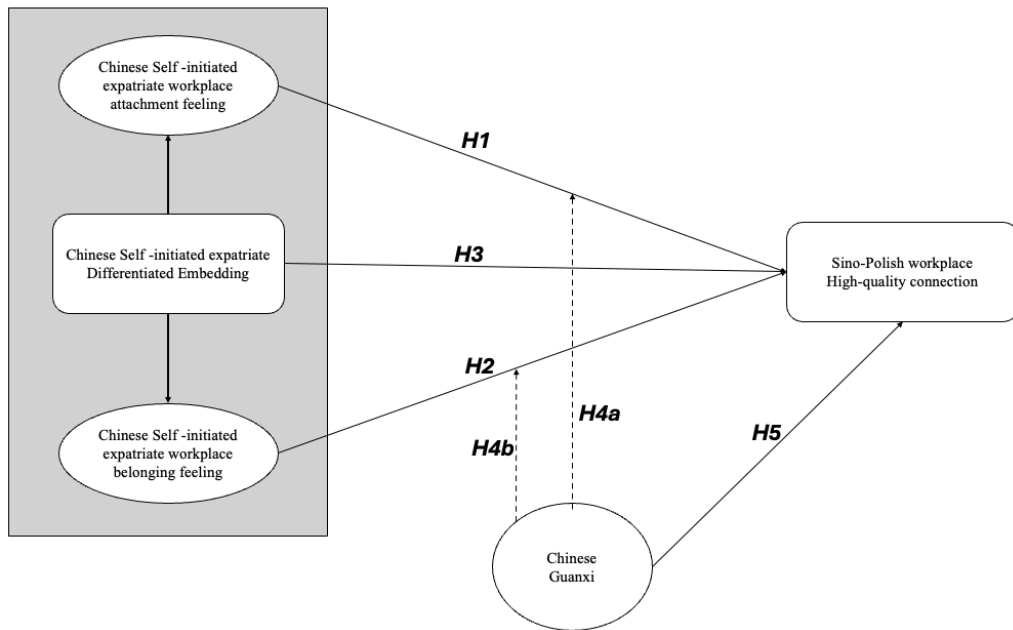
H4a: Chinese Guanxi moderates the relationship between attachment feelings and high-quality connections in the Sino-Polish workplace.

H4b: Chinese Guanxi moderates the relationship between the sense of belonging and high-quality connections in the Sino-Polish workplace.

H5: Chinese Guanxi positively affects high-quality connections in the Sino-Polish workplace.

Based on hypotheses, the theoretical model built for study 1 is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

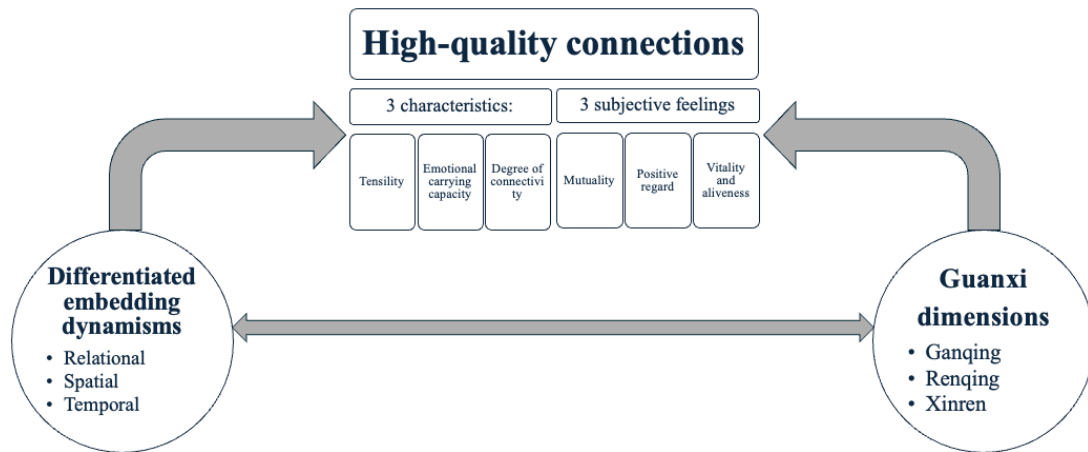


Source: Own elaboration

2.1.3 Framework for Study 2

Study 2 builds on the Study 1 model by directly examining how relationships are formed, experienced, and maintained in the Sino-Polish workplace. While Study 1 maps structural links among attachment, belonging, differentiated embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connections, Study 2 focuses on the workplace experiences of Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees. To do this, Study 2 uses an integrative analytical framework (Figure 2) based on literature about differentiated embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connections. This framework shapes interview questions and guides the thematic analysis, directing the organization, coding, and interpretation of interview data.

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework Developed for Study 2



Source: Own elaboration

In summary, the integration of the theoretical perspectives provides a robust foundation for the proposed research models for study 1 and study 2. Drawing on these models, the study formulates theoretically grounded hypotheses for the quantitative analysis and extends the conceptual framework to inform the design and analytical focus of the qualitative phase. Together, the selected variables and proposed pathways are firmly anchored in established academic theories, ensuring theoretical rigor and enhancing the study’s explanatory power in understanding how positive relationships are formed and sustained between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and their Polish coworkers in the Sino-Polish workplace.

2.2 Overview of Research Methodology

In recent years, social science researchers have widely adopted mixed-method approaches to address the limitations of single quantitative or qualitative analyses in explaining complex social phenomena. One core challenge is that many variables in social science research, despite theoretical support, are often difficult to observe directly (Blanchard et al., 2014). To more effectively capture such abstract variables, researchers typically employ self-reporting tools, such as Likert-scale surveys, to achieve more objective quantitative analysis (Tanujaya et al., 2022).

Researchers widely use Likert-based surveys to measure individual attitudes, behavioral tendencies, and perceptions of specific environments due to their ease of use and interpretability. These surveys guide respondents to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements, quantifying personal views and attitudes (McLeod, 2019). This method not only effectively captures individuals' subjective perceptions but also provides researchers with structured data suitable for statistical analysis, revealing potential relationships among attitudes (McLeod et al., 2011). Thus, the Likert scale serves as a practical and efficient measurement tool that helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of respondents' cognitive and behavioral patterns (Subedi, 2016).

However, in the actual data collection process, overreliance on Likert surveys may also affect the quality of the research. Some participants may lack patience, be distracted, or make hasty choices because they did not carefully read the instructions when filling out the questionnaire (Huang et al., 2012). These situations undoubtedly pose challenges for researchers in data screening and analysis and remind us that while quantitative tools are convenient and efficient, they are not perfect. For this reason, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods has increasingly become an important strategy in social science research for understanding complex phenomena. Specifically, mixed-methods research provides statistical correlations to identify patterns, while qualitative insights uncover reasons and contexts behind participants' responses. This comprehensive approach enables researchers to validate findings, address inconsistencies, and better understand the interplay of variables. By systematically integrating quantitative data and qualitative materials, researchers can establish more logical and explanatory analytical frameworks, making their research not only evidence-based but also more persuasive and empathetic.

Given that the Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees in this study constitute a very small minority in Poland and the sample size is relatively limited, the flexibility of the mixed-methods approach may provide a deeper, more detailed understanding of this small case (Maxwell, 2016). By integrating multiple data sources, the mixed-methods approach not only helps researchers address deeper, more complex research questions but also provides a multi-

angle, multi-perspective lens for observing social phenomena (Shorten and Smith, 2017; Poth and Munce, 2020). This enables researchers to grasp the dynamic processes underlying phenomena, uncover the interactive mechanisms among their components, and thereby contribute to the development of more explanatory and substantive theories (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

Although mixed-method research is often time consuming and requires significant resources during implementation, the comprehensive perspective and in-depth insights it provides can compensate for the details and connections that may be overlooked by single-method approaches (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Especially in the cross-cultural workplace context explored in this study, which aims to reveal how employees establish positive relationships within the context of Sino-Polish cultural integration, such topics are highly complex and context-dependent and therefore require the support of mixed-methods research.

Specifically, this study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell et al., 2016; Bhana, 2024), collecting quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously from Chinese expatriate employees and their Polish coworkers. Creswell et al. (2016) note that this strategy is often referred to as a “concurrent design” in the mixed-methods literature. The core of this approach is collecting data in parallel during the same timeframe, gathering both statistical trends and individual experiences through analysis of relationships among variables (Castro et al., 2010). This method is well-suited to complex social phenomena, as it enables researchers to capture collective trends and individual voices within the same context (Stentz et al., 2012).

In summary, the mixed-method design provides a flexible and comprehensive research framework for this study. In particular, the convergent parallel mixed-methods design maintains the systematic nature of the research while providing a more comprehensive perspective for exploring the complex and dynamic interpersonal interactions in the Sino-Polish workplace. By conducting questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews simultaneously, this study can not only reveal common trends in the sample but also delve into the subtle differences in individual experiences, thereby achieving complementarity and integration between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell et al., 2003). Therefore,

the design of this study provides a path for exploring Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplace relationships that combine empirical depth with interpretive breadth. In terms of data collection, the quantitative component utilizes a questionnaire comprising multiple validated and established scales to capture systematic relationships among constructs. The qualitative component utilizes semi-structured interview methods, ensuring the interview process remains focused while allowing space for emerging ideas and subtle insights (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

Following this methodological outline, the next sections will respectively introduce the sample sources, data collection processes, measures, and interview tools, as well as the corresponding data analysis and integration strategies for the two phases of the study.

2.3 Study 1: Quantitative Component

To explore general trends and potential factors influencing Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees in establishing interpersonal relationships in the Sino-Polish workplace, this study conducted a survey in the first stage. To measure variables included in the research model, the research design for this stage relied on existing validated scales and was conducted among Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees working in Poland in different industries. The aim was to identify the respondents' overall perceptions of the core concepts: belonging feeling, attachment feeling, high-quality connection, and Guanxi.

This phase of data will describe how Chinese employees build relationships in cross-cultural workplaces. The next sections detail the survey participants and sample, the questionnaire design and variables, the data collection process, and the statistical analysis methods.

2.3.1 Participants and Sampling Strategy

In cross-cultural workplace research, Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees are a relatively neglected but highly valuable group to study. They usually choose to work in Poland based on their personal preferences and face numerous challenges related to language, culture, and workplace systems, which often lead to rich, authentic cross-cultural communication

experiences. To more effectively achieve the objectives of this study and delve deeper into the relevant phenomena, it is necessary to ensure that the participants possess specific key characteristics. Specifically, given that the study focuses on Chinese self-initiated expatriates, the questionnaire targets are limited to Chinese employees who have voluntarily joined companies in Poland, while other demographic variables, such as age, gender, and industry background, are kept open to ensure sample diversity.

However, as mentioned above, the number of Chinese self-initiated expatriates is limited, and it is difficult to estimate the total number of Chinese residents in Poland. According to the Office for Foreigners (2021), approximately 7,000 Chinese citizens with valid residence permits live in Poland. Among them, around 1,500 are students enrolled at Polish universities, making the Chinese the third largest group of foreign students from non-neighboring countries (Ogonowska-Rejer, 2022). Some of these students may potentially become future Chinese self-initiated expatriates. Nevertheless, many Chinese students tend to return to China or move to English-speaking countries for further studies, as international experience is often perceived as an advantage for better employment opportunities (Wardęga, 2017). Due to the relatively small population size and high mobility of Chinese residents in Poland, Chinese self-initiated expatriates are difficult to identify in both statistical data and existing academic literature. Moreover, they are scattered across different industries and regions, which further complicates the process of locating and studying this group. Therefore, effective data collection is crucial to verify the theoretical framework. This study adopted a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that the collected data accurately reflect participants' experiences of interaction in the Sino-Polish workplace.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a non-probability sampling method that emphasizes the purposive selection of individuals with specific attributes or experiences based on research objectives and judgment criteria. Etikan et al. (2016) point out that the core of this method lies in the researcher having a clear understanding of their research objectives and actively seeking out "information-rich cases", individuals with relevant experience who are willing to provide in-depth information. This strategy is widely adopted in

qualitative research, particularly when sample resources are limited and the number of research subjects is small. Such sampling not only focuses on individuals' knowledge backgrounds and practical experiences but also emphasizes their accessibility, expressive abilities, and willingness to participate. During the sample selection process, this study ensured that participants had cross-cultural workplace experience while also fully considering their expressive abilities and willingness to communicate, thereby enhancing data quality and the interpretive power of subsequent analyses (Bernerd, 2002; Etikan et al., 2016).

In terms of specific implementation, this study invited eligible Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees to participate in the questionnaire through various channels, including social media platforms (such as WeChat groups), Chinese expatriate communities in Poland, Chinese-funded enterprises, local companies employing Chinese employees in Poland, and mutual recommendations among employees. To ensure that the sample had authentic and continuous cross-cultural interaction experience, this study set the following basic screening conditions:

1. Being a Chinese self-initiated expatriate currently employed at a Polish organization, a Chinese enterprise operating in Poland, or one of their subsidiaries.
2. Being employed in a functional department (such as administration, human resources, marketing, or finance) that requires frequent interaction with Polish colleagues.
3. Having been employed at their current organization in Poland for at least six months.
4. Engaging in direct interaction with Polish colleagues for an average of at least 10 hours per week (including face-to-face, virtual meetings, and phone calls).

The sample recruitment strategy for this study was designed to ensure participants had stable, authentic Sino-Polish interaction experiences, enabling them to provide in-depth responses to the research questions. By leveraging existing professional networks for referrals and screening, this approach not only improved response rates for questionnaires and interviews but also facilitated the establishment of initial trust relationships in the early stages of the study, thereby enhancing the authenticity and contextual sensitivity of the data.

The analysis began with descriptive statistics using SPSS to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, including gender, education level, length of residence in Poland, working language, and company type.

According to the questionnaire collection results, 122 questionnaires were collected, of which 121 were valid. SPSS 27.0 was used to conduct descriptive statistics and subsequent preliminary analyses in this study. To provide a clearer understanding of the demographic characteristics of Chinese self-initiated expatriates, the descriptive results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Items	Category	n	%	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	72	59.50	59.50
	Female	49	40.50	100.00
Educational background	High school	1	0.83	0.83
	Bachelor	63	52.07	52.89
	Master	41	33.88	86.78
	Doctoral	16	13.22	100.00
Years of Residence	1-3 years	31	25.62	25.62
	4-7years	53	43.80	69.42
	7-10years	25	20.66	90.08
	10-13years	8	6.61	96.69
	13-15years	4	3.31	100.00
Type of Employees	Chinese company	44	36.36	36.36
	Polish company	77	63.64	100.00
Total		121	100.0	100.0

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents, i.e., Chinese self-initiated expatriates, in terms of basic demographic characteristics, including gender, educational background, years of residency, and company type in which they work.

First, regarding gender distribution, 59.50% of respondents are male, and 40.50% are female. This indicates a slight predominance of males in the sample. The overall education level is high: the majority hold a bachelor's degree (52.07%), followed by a master's degree (33.88%) and a

doctoral degree (13.22%). This shows that most Chinese self-initiated expatriates in the sample belong to the white-collar, high-skilled segment. For years of residence, 69.42% have lived in Poland for more than 4 years, with the largest proportion (43.80%) in the “4–7 years” category. This suggests a relatively stable population of self-initiated expatriates. For company type, 63.64% work for Polish companies and 36.36% for Chinese companies, indicating a strong preference for Polish employers.

To gain a clearer understanding of the working languages used by Chinese employees in cross-cultural workplaces, this study took multiple choice questions to describe it. Response rates and prevalence rates were used to view the preferences of Chinese employees in using language in the workplace (Table 3).

Table 3: Frequency and Prevalence of Commonly Used Workplace Languages

Language type	N	Response	Prevalence (%)
		Rate (%)	(n=121)
Chinese	85	31.37%	70.25%
English	108	39.85%	89.26%
Polish	78	28.78%	64.46%
Total	271	100%	223.97%

Notes:

- n = number of responses (multiple choices allowed).
- Response Rate (%) = (n for each language) / (total responses, 271).
- Prevalence (%) = (n for each language) / (sample size, 121) × 100%.
- Percentages may not sum to 100% due to multiple responses per participant.

Table 3 presents the response rates and prevalence of the three most used working languages: Chinese, English, and Polish, among 121 respondents. English is the most popular working language, chosen by 108 people (89.26% of the overall sample), and it also has the highest percentage of total language responses (39.85%). This highlights the central role of English in workplace communication among Chinese and Polish coworkers. Chinese is used by 85 respondents (70.25%), maintaining a significant presence in the Sino-Polish workplace. Polish was spoken by 78 respondents (64.46%), slightly fewer than those who spoke Chinese, but still indicating the importance of the host-country language in Sino-Polish workplace

communication. To sum up, this finding reflects that multilingualism is crucial in Sino-Polish workplaces, as most respondents reported using more than one working language.

To ensure sample quality, this study further designed a reasonably structured and transparent questionnaire to capture the perceptions and attitudes of Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees in the Sino-Polish workplace regarding key variables, i.e., sense of belonging, attachment style, high-quality connection, and Guanxi. The following is a detailed description of the logic of the questionnaire's composition, the sources of each measure and its dimensions.

2.3.2 Questionnaire Structure and Measures Used

This section outlines the questionnaire, including its variable design. The questionnaire includes established and validated scales measuring belonging feeling, attachment styles, high-quality connections, and Guanxi. All items are scored using a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree”, 5 = “Strongly Agree”), and the questionnaire is divided into two main sections.

The questionnaire starts with five questions on gender, educational background, years of residence in Poland, working language (allowing multiple selections), and company type (Chinese-owned or Polish local). These variables describe the sample's demographic characteristics and serve as the basis for grouping in later analyses, providing context for comparing responses across participant segments.

Given that differentiated embedding in the workplace lacks a direct measurement scale. This study addresses this by focusing on two core features: sense of belonging and attachment feeling. Both are defined as first-order latent variables that jointly capture the second-order construct of differentiated workplace embedding. This approach follows Ryan's (2017) framework, which highlights belonging and attachment as core experiential aspects. The first part of the questionnaire thus centers on these two key variables, which form the basis for higher-order modeling of differentiated embedding in the Sino-Polish workplace

- Workplace Belongingness Scale (WBS) was developed by Jena and Pradhan (2018) to assess employees' sense of belonging within an organization. The scale comprises 12 positively

worded items, such as “In my work unit, I have many common themes with my co-workers.” It demonstrates a clear unidimensional structure and high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.949$). Both convergent and discriminant validity meet the recommended standards.

- Workplace Attachment Style Questionnaire (WASQ) is based on Bowlby’s attachment theory and Bartholomew and Horowitz’s four-category attachment model, developed by Scrima et al. (2018). The scale comprises 15 items measuring three attachment styles: dismissive (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.934$), secure (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.929$), and preoccupied (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.947$). Example items include:

1. Dismissive: “In my organization, I prefer to avoid certain places, even if that interferes with my work.”
2. Secure: “I’m attached to my workplace.”
3. Preoccupied: “I find it difficult to feel at ease at my workplace.”

Both convergent and discriminant validity meet the recommended standards.

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on high-quality connections in Sino-Polish workplaces and the Chinese unique Guanxi skills:

- The High-Quality Connections Scale (HQC) developed based on Dutton and Heaphy’s (2003) theoretical framework and Stephens et al.’s (2012) empirical work, comprises 19 items covering two dimensions: relationship capabilities (emotional carrying capacity, tensility, and connectivity) and subjective experiences (positive regard and mutuality).

The subscales under relationship capabilities demonstrated high internal consistency: emotional carrying capacity (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.889$), tensility (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.856$), and connectivity (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.841$). Example items include:

1. Emotional carrying capacity: “My co-workers and I do not have any difficulty expressing our feelings to each other”.
2. Tensility: “We cope well with the conflicts we experience at work.”
3. Connectivity: “We are always open to listening to our co-workers’ new ideas.”

Similarly, the subscales under subjective experiences also showed strong reliability, with positive regard (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.846$) and mutuality (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.895$). Example items include:

1. Positive regard: "I feel that my co-workers like me."
2. Mutuality: "The relationship between my co-workers and myself is based on mutuality."

The scale demonstrated adequate convergent and discriminant validity."

- Guanxi Scale (GRX), developed by Yen, Barnes, and Wang (2011) and Yen et al. (2017); this scale is rooted in Chinese culture and divided into three dimensions: Ganqing, (emotional bonds), Renqing (reciprocity), and Xinren (interpersonal trust). There are 11 items in total. The subscales demonstrated high internal consistency: Ganqing (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.860$), Renqing (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.813$), and Xinren (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.743$). Example items include:

1. Ganqing: "My Polish coworker's representative and I are able to talk openly as friends."
2. Renqing: "I feel a sense of obligation to this Polish coworker's representative for doing her/him a favor."
3. Xinren (reverse-coded items): "Polish coworker's representative is only concerned about herself/himself. *"

Convergent and discriminant validity were confirmed to be within acceptable thresholds. Overall, the questionnaire combines validated measurement scales to examine belonging, attachment, high-quality connections, and Guanxi in the Sino-Polish workplace context. All scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity. The entire questionnaire structure can be found in Appendix 2.

2.4 Study 2: Qualitative Component

This study employed semi-structured interviews as a parallel research method. This approach aimed to gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of individual embeddedness, relational networks, and the construction of high-quality relationships in Chinese and Polish workplaces.

The interview participants comprised two distinct groups: Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish local employees, to capture diverse perspectives on how positive workplace relationships are perceived and formed in cross-cultural settings. The semi-structured interview process unfolded in three key stages: participant recruitment and selection, interview implementation, and data management.

1) Recruitment and Selection

The study participants consisted of Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish local employees. Chinese interviewees were primarily selected from survey participants who voluntarily provided their contact information. This ensured both high relevance to the research topic and a high level of engagement. To maintain contextual consistency and enable complementary perspectives, each Polish and Chinese interviewee pair was drawn from the same workplace. This pairing approach allows for cross-validation of experiences and helps construct a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of workplace dynamics. To facilitate this, Chinese participants were invited to recommend their Polish colleagues for the interview. As a result, interviewees were recruited in matched dyads, each consisting of one Chinese and one Polish employee from the same organization. This “China–Poland paired” sampling design ensured that each dyad shared common workplace experiences. Both parties could then describe and interpret the same organizational context from their respective cultural perspectives. This approach significantly enhanced the specificity and depth of the cross-cultural analysis.

2) Interview Implementation

The preferred interview method is in-depth, face-to-face discussions held in quiet, private locations such as offices, meeting rooms, or cafes. If interviewees could not attend in person due to geography or scheduling, remote interviews used video conferencing tools like Zoom, Skype, or Tencent Meeting. Regardless of the method used, the research objectives, process, and confidentiality commitments were thoroughly explained to the interviewee before the interview. An audio or video recording of the entire interview was conducted only after obtaining written or verbal consent.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes. Before the interview, the researcher asked the interviewee to provide an overview of their work background, job responsibilities, and experience relevant to the research topic. This ensured complete and diverse data. During the interview, the researcher followed the outline, asked follow-up questions based on the responses, and remained open and flexible.

3) Transcription and Ensuring Confidentiality

The researcher handles all audio and video recordings with the utmost care. Verbatim transcriptions are completed within one week following each interview to ensure the accuracy and immediacy of the information. Prior to recording, the researcher seeks and obtains the interviewee's informed consent and explains that the transcribed content will be used exclusively for academic analysis and thesis writing, with no external disclosure.

During data processing, all information involving personal identities or company-sensitive content is anonymized. Real names are replaced by coded identifiers in strict accordance with academic ethical standards. All original recordings and transcription documents are securely stored on encrypted hard drives. The data is also regularly backed up.

Interviews with Polish employees were conducted in English. Those with Chinese employees were conducted in Chinese. All data were translated for coding and comparison. A total of seven dyads (14 participants) were interviewed. Each dyad consisted of a Chinese self-initiated expatriate and a Polish employee. The number of participants was sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation for each research theme. These participants came from seven companies across various industries and organizational types. The sample included Chinese-owned enterprises, Polish local companies, and joint ventures to ensure diversity and representativeness. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. Following each interview, the researcher promptly transcribed the recordings into verbatim transcripts. All personal and corporate information was anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

As shown in Table 4, this study included seven Chinese self-initiated expatriates and seven Polish employees with diverse backgrounds in both Chinese and Polish companies.

Table 4: Demographic and Workplace Characteristics of Interview Participant

Demographic and workplace characteristics of respondents							
Respondent Code	Gender	Years in Company	Respondent Code	Gender	Years in Company	Company Type	Industry
CH-1	M	5	PL-1	F	3	PL	International Trading
CH-2	M	1.5	PL-2	F	4	CH	Vehicle Manufacturing
CH-3	M	3	PL-3	M	6	PL	Pharmaceuticals
CH-4	F	1.3	PL-4	M	2.5	PL	Clothing
CH-5	M	7	PL-5	M	6.5	CH	Materials Recycling
CH-6	F	2	PL-6	M	6	PL	Academia
CH-7	M	2	PL-7	M	2	CH	Logistics

Notes:

- CH: Chinese self-initiated expatriates; Chinese company
- PL: Polish local employees; Polish company
- M: Male
- F: Female

4) Interview scenario

All interview questions in this study were developed based on the theoretical framework. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) noted, “A conceptual framework forces you to be selective, to decide which variables are most important, which relationships are likely to be most meaningful, and, as a consequence, what information should be collected and analyzed, at least at the outset” (p.37). Guided by this principle, the present study adopts a theory-driven approach. Each interview question is explicitly linked to the research question and key constructs of the model. This design facilitates both data categorization and theoretical interpretation in later stages.

The interview guide was designed in two different versions: one for Chinese self-initiated expatriates and the other for Polish employees. The detailed outlines are provided in Appendices 3 and 4. The interview script is structured into three thematic categories, each comprising three to five core questions, while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions. Interviewers may adapt the sequence or wording of questions to the interviewee’s actual narrative, ensuring the interview process remains open and reflects the participant’s authentic thoughts and emotions. Questions are contextually grounded in the participants’ everyday work experiences, encouraging them to recall real-life examples, specific incidents, and interpersonal dynamics. These may include detailed accounts of workplace behaviors, communication patterns, and instances of cultural conflict or adjustment.

Interviews with Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees took place in Chinese. Interviews with Polish employees were conducted in English. To minimize language barriers and ease participants’ anxiety, they were encouraged to use native words and familiar phrases, including Chinese-English and English-Polish hybrids.

Below are examples of the interview questions:

Theme 1: Exploring the embedding process:

What were your first impressions of the Sino-Polish workplace?

Theme 2: Guanxi feeling:

In your life and work in Poland, do you apply elements of Chinese relationship culture (such as Mianzi or Renqing) in your interactions? If so, how?

Theme 3: Workplace Relationships:

In relationships with Polish colleagues, do you feel comfortable expressing your emotions, whether happiness or sadness?

Through this interview design and a rigorous data management protocol, the study ensures scientific rigor in data collection and analysis. These steps lay a strong foundation for exploring how Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees develop positive relationships in cross-cultural workplace settings.

2.5 Data Analysis Strategy

This section outlines the main approaches used for data analysis and integration, including statistical analysis of quantitative data, thematic analysis of qualitative data, and strategies for integrating the findings from both methods.

2.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

In terms of quantitative data analysis, this study collected questionnaire responses from 122 Chinese self-initiated expatriates working in Poland. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to examine how differentiated embedding and Guanxi influence the workplace relationships of these self-initiated expatriates in the Polish context.

In addition, the means, standard deviations, and distribution characteristics of the core variables, including sense of belonging, attachment style, high-quality connections, and Guanxi, were calculated to provide a comprehensive overview of the sample and its underlying data structure.

Before conducting formal modeling, the study conducted preliminary reliability and validity tests for all measurement instruments. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of each scale. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was then used to examine the latent structures of the variables, including the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of sphericity, principal component extraction,

and varimax rotation. These steps were undertaken to confirm the structural validity and to clarify the dimensions of each construct and the interrelationships among items.

Kline (2023) notes that when multiple first-order latent variables are theoretically conceptualized as distinct manifestations of a more abstract construct, they may be modeled as a higher-order latent construct. Beyond the already validated higher-order structures of Guanxi and high-quality connections, it is necessary to conduct a dedicated measurement model analysis to support differentiated embedding. As introduced earlier in this study, differentiated embedding in the workplace is modeled as a reflective higher-order construct, with sense of belonging and attachment feeling specified as first-order reflective dimensions. Given this specification, it is essential to assess the measurement fit and structural feasibility of the higher-order model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

To ensure the study's methodological rigor, confirmatory validation was conducted separately for all three core higher-order constructs: differentiated embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connections. This approach helped establish the stability and adequacy of each measurement model. Based on the EFA results, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS 24 with the Chinese sample. Three main models were analyzed: the embedding model (with belonging and attachment), the high-quality connection model (with multiple sub-dimensions), and the Guanxi model (with ganqing, renqing, and xinren). Model fit was assessed using several indices, including CMIN/df, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, CFI, and TLI. The study also examined standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. These steps ensured theoretical consistency and measurement accuracy across linguistic and cultural contexts.

After confirming the measurement model, inferential statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 27.0. Given the small sample size and research focus, multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework. High-quality connections were treated as the dependent variable, with embedding, attachment, and belonging as independent variables, and the Guanxi construct as a moderating variable. All independent

and moderator variables were mean-centered, and interaction terms were created and included in the regression model to examine the significance and direction of Guanxi's moderating effects in the context of cross-cultural relationship formation among Chinese and Polish employees.

In conclusion, the first study applied a quantitative approach. From data preparation and instrument validation to model testing and hypothesis evaluation, each step was designed to ensure the scientific credibility of the research findings and to provide a strong statistical foundation for subsequent theoretical insights and practical implications.

2.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

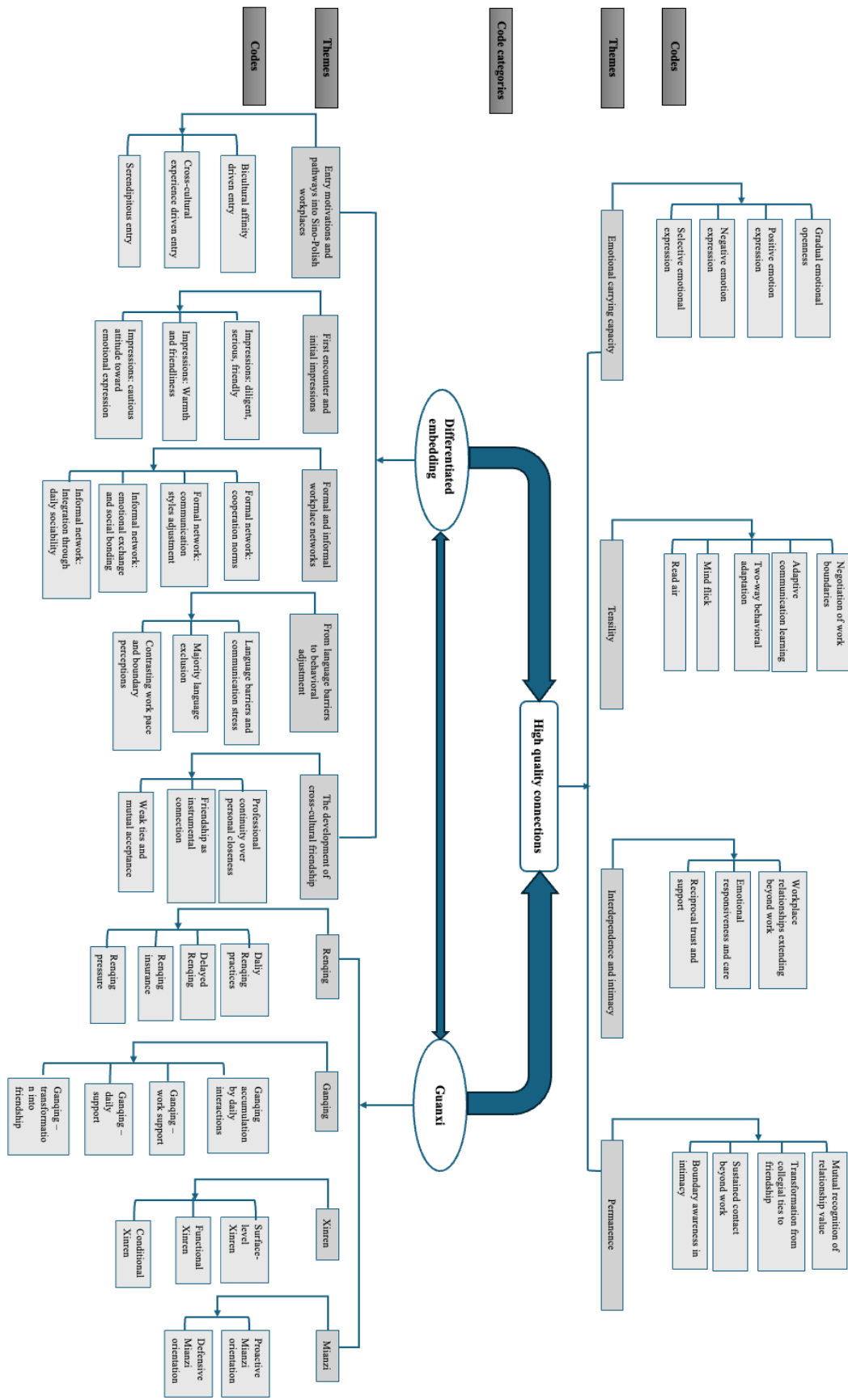
For the qualitative component, the second study used semi-structured paired interviews to better understand the interaction patterns and relationship-building mechanisms between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and their Polish coworkers in Polish cross-cultural workplaces.

This study adopts Saldaña's (2015) concept of the "cyclical process", framing qualitative analysis as an iterative process of analyzing, reflecting, and reanalyzing. This approach emphasizes the continuous refinement of understanding through repeated reading and comparison of the data. The coding strategy integrated both deductive and inductive methods to establish a two-way correspondence between the theoretical framework and the emerging themes (Miles et al., 2014; Glińska-Neweś et al., 2019). At the initial stage, a preliminary codebook was developed based on relevant theoretical models and literature. This codebook included core dimensions such as "differentiated embedding", "high-quality connections", and "Guanxi", each with clearly defined operational definitions to enhance consistency and reproducibility in the analytical process.

During the data organization phase, all audio recordings were transcribed into verbatim texts. The author carefully reviewed each transcript, segmenting the content thematically and semantically, while recording initial impressions and key observations in Excel. In the subsequent systematic coding phase, the author highlighted and annotated segments that corresponded to the theoretical dimensions outlined in the codebook.

Besides deductive coding, inductive exploration used “in vivo” coding. This involved finding frequently used phrases, repeating patterns, and new phenomena not covered by the initial codes. The process included many rounds of comparison, reorganization, and reflection. Through this, both types of codes were integrated and refined into a final coding structure. The code tree (Figure 3), based on the framework of study2, shows the code categories, themes, and detailed in vivo codes from the interviews.

Figure 3: Hierarchical Code Tree of the Qualitative Analysis



Source: Own elaboration based on interviews

Finally, excerpts from each theme were compared and interpreted to integrate the findings. This allowed the researchers to identify the key mechanisms and culturally situated characteristics through which Chinese and Polish employees build, repair, and sustain workplace relationships in Sino-Polish workplace environments.

2.5.3 Mixed-Methods Data Analysis

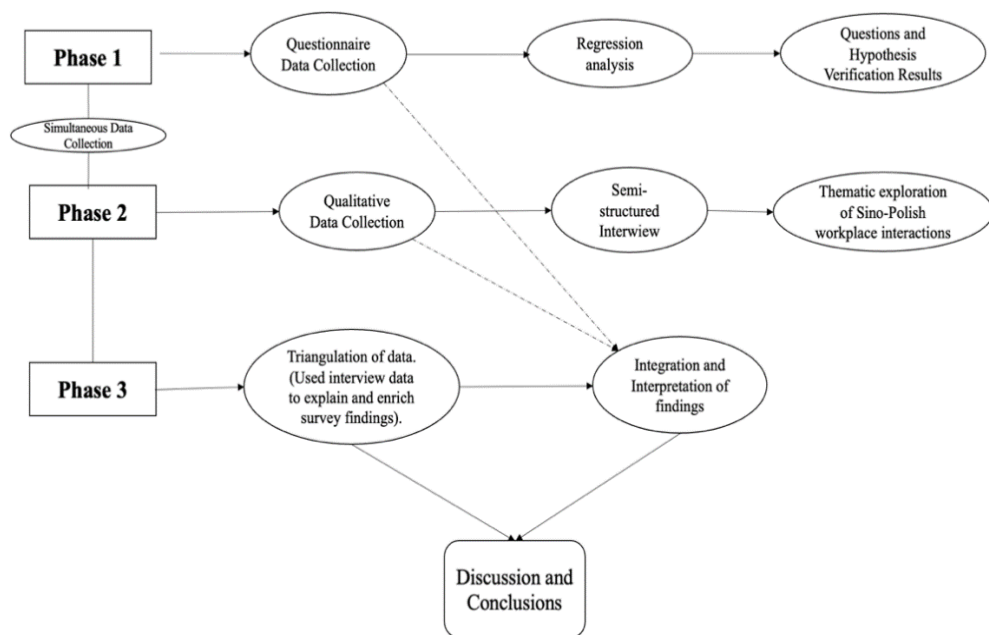
To enhance the scientific quality and interpretive depth of its conclusions, this research adopts a convergent parallel mixed-methods design that collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data concurrently for methodological complementarity and mutual validation (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). A subset of the quantitative sample was invited for qualitative interviews to enable sample level integration (Fetters, Curry, and Creswell, 2013).

The integration of analytical strategies in this research is reflected in the parallel implementation of Study 1 and Study 2. Study 1 (quantitative) and Study 2 (qualitative) were conducted concurrently, each contributing distinct yet complementary analytical strengths. Study 1 employed SPSS and AMOS to examine reliability, validity, and regression relationships among key constructs, including differentiated embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connections, thereby identifying patterns of association across variables. At the same time, Study 2 used semi-structured paired interviews to provide in-depth insights into the lived experiences, interaction patterns, and contextual meanings that shape workplace relationships between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and their Polish coworkers. Conducting the two strands in parallel allowed for methodological complementarity and facilitated the integration of statistical evidence with interpretive insights.

In the interpretation and presentation phase, the study adopts a joint display format, presenting statistical results alongside qualitative themes to achieve meaningful integration and cross-verification of the two data types. This approach enhances the clarity and coherence of the findings and helps highlight where the two data strands converge, differ, or complement each other. In addition, an analytical integration strategy was applied to interpret core themes, including differentiated embedding processes, Guanxi, and high-quality connections, from both

conceptual and empirical perspectives. The three stages of the mixed-methods design adopted in this research are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design for This Study



Source: Own elaboration

Overall, the use of mixed methods broadens the conceptual reach and practical value of this study. While the quantitative strand supports model building and hypothesis testing, the qualitative component adds depth to understanding interpersonal dynamics and cultural interactions in workplace contexts. Together, they provide a fuller picture and generate insights that are both theoretically meaningful and practically useful, particularly for organizations involved in cross-cultural management.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research design, data collection procedures, analytical strategies, and the logic of methodological integration. Integrating the two studies ensures that statistical evidence from Study 1 is enriched and contextualized by the interpretive depth of Study 2. This achieves both methodological complementarity and theoretical coherence. The study balances conceptual structure with contextual sensitivity. Joint display tables and integrated analysis further support the coherence of the findings. This lays a strong foundation for the empirical results in the next chapter, where the research hypotheses will be examined in detail.

Chapter 3: Quantitative Study Findings

This section presents the main quantitative findings. Through data analysis, the study sequentially tests the hypotheses proposed in the theoretical model and analyzes the differentiated embedding mechanism, high-quality connection constructs, and Guanxi moderating effects of Chinese self-initiated expatriates in the Sino-Polish workplace.

3.1 Normality Test

Before formally testing the hypotheses, this study systematically examined the reliability and validity of the scales used. Although the questionnaires were based on widely used and validated English-language scales, all items were translated into Chinese to fit the research context of the Sino-Polish workplace. Given the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural nature of this study, it was necessary to reassess the reliability and construct validity. The analysis proceeded as follows: first, normality tests were conducted; second, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α ; third, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed; and finally, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted.

3.1.1 Normality Test for Core Dimensions

This study further conducts normality tests on the key variables to examine their data distributions and to provide information on central tendency, dispersion, distributional shape, and other relevant statistical indicators. Specifically, descriptive statistics are reported for the five core dimensions investigated in this study: belonging, attachment, differentiated embedding, high-quality connections, and Guanxi (Table 5).

Table 5: Results of Normality Test for Core Dimensions

Dimensions	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median	Kurtosis	Skewness
Belonging	1.25	4.833	3.315	1.018	3.583	-1.011	-0.415
Attachment	1.133	4.8	3.226	0.983	3.4	-1.104	-0.232
Differentiated Embedding	1.325	4.733	3.275	0.942	3.342	-1.064	-0.296
High-Quality Connections	1.917	4.8	3.601	0.659	3.733	-0.763	-0.357
Guanxi	2	5	3.61	0.647	3.694	-0.625	-0.167

Table 5 shows normality test results for the five core model dimensions, revealing central tendencies and distributions for each variable. Mean values range from 3.2 to 3.6, indicating respondents hold moderately positive perceptions of key workplace factors. Guanxi (3.61) and high-quality connections (3.601) have the highest averages, suggesting Chinese self-initiated expatriates strongly identify with and view coworker relationships and high-quality connections positively. Attachment (3.226) shows a slightly lower score, which aligns with varying attachment styles among respondents.

From a standard deviation perspective, the range of variation for each variable is between 0.647 and 1.018. This indicates significant differences in the experiences of Chinese self-initiated expatriates across these dimensions. Belonging (SD = 1.018) has the largest standard deviation among these variables, suggesting that Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees have particularly rich and diverse experiences in this regard.

Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis indicators show that all variables have negative values below 2, indicating a relatively flat distribution and slight left skewness without severe skewness. Overall, the distribution characteristics of this set of variables are good and consistent with the normal distribution assumption.

3.1.2 Normality Test for Sub-dimensions

To verify the reliability of the scale, this study conducted a normality test on its three sub-dimensions: Attachment Style (Dismissive, Secure, Preoccupied); High-Quality Connections

(Emotional Carrying Capacity, Tensility, Connectivity, Positive Regard, Mutuality); and Guanxi (Ganqing, Renqing, Xinren). This produced a total of eleven sub-dimensions. The specific results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Normality Test for Sub-dimensions

Sub-dimensions	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median	Kurtosis	Skewness
Dismissive	1	5	3.223	1.215	3.6	-1.135	-0.346
Secure	1	5	3.241	1.121	3.4	-1.09	-0.214
Preoccupied	1	5	3.215	1.196	3.4	-0.985	-0.309
Emotional carrying capacity	1	5	3.287	1.056	3.5	-0.522	-0.468
Tensility	1	5	3.64	0.935	3.75	-0.172	-0.546
Connectivity	1.25	5	3.779	0.928	4	-0.301	-0.549
Positive regard	1.333	5	3.595	0.961	4	-0.396	-0.523
Mutuality	1.25	5	3.702	0.998	4	-0.695	-0.502
Ganqing	1.5	5	3.638	0.921	3.75	-0.904	-0.323
Renqing	1.25	5	3.597	0.87	3.75	-0.412	-0.314
Xinren	1.333	5	3.595	0.92	3.667	-0.494	-0.502

As shown in Table 6, the mean values for each sub-dimension range from 3.215 to 3.779, which are consistent with the main variables' performance and indicate an overall moderately positive level across the Attachment Style subscales. Preoccupied ($M = 3.215$) and dismissive ($M = 3.223$) are both slightly lower than Secure ($M = 3.241$), suggesting that Chinese self-initiated expatriates generally experience a relatively secure sense of attachment in Sino-Polish workplaces.

From the perspective of high-quality connections, connectivity ($M = 3.779$) and tensility ($M = 3.64$) received the highest scores. This suggests that Chinese self-initiated expatriates experience a strong sense of mutual connection and recognition in Sino-Polish workplaces. Also, the high Tensility score further confirms their ability to establish resilient working relationships with Polish coworkers.

The three Guanxi subscales show similar mean values, indicating that Chinese self-initiated expatriates perceive all dimensions of Guanxi positively and with little variation among them.

In terms of standard deviation, the range for each subscale was between 0.87 and 1.215, indicating considerable individual variation in Chinese self-initiated expatriates' perceptions. Dismissive (SD = 1.215) and Preoccupied (SD = 1.196) showed the greatest fluctuations, consistent with the relatively large differences in attachment styles.

Regarding distributional characteristics, all sub-dimensions exhibit negative skewness and kurtosis, with absolute skewness ranging from 0.214 to 0.549 and absolute kurtosis ranging from 0.172 to 1.135, well below the conventional threshold of 2. This indicates that the distributions of all subscales are approximately normal, with no significant skewness or kurtosis, and fully meet the prerequisites for subsequent statistical analyses.

3.2 Reliability Test

After the descriptive statistics section, this study proceeded to test the reliability and validity of the scale. Cronbach's alpha is the most used indicator of internal consistency for scale items (Cronbach, 1951; Cronbach and Shavelson, 2004). The overall reliability results for the scale are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Results of Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis

Dimension	Items	Corrected Item- Total Correlation (CITC)	Cronbach's α if Item Deleted	Cronbach's α
Belonging	A1	0.767	0.944	0.949
	A2	0.727	0.946	
	A3	0.77	0.944	
	A4	0.756	0.945	
	A5	0.761	0.945	
	A6	0.751	0.945	
	A7	0.736	0.946	
	A8	0.759	0.945	
	A9	0.774	0.944	
	A10	0.783	0.944	
	A11	0.775	0.944	
	A12	0.744	0.945	
Dismissive	B1	0.862	0.912	0.934
	B2	0.806	0.923	
	B3	0.85	0.915	
	B4	0.869	0.911	
	B5	0.741	0.934	
Secure	C1	0.773	0.92	0.929
	C2	0.845	0.906	
	C3	0.825	0.91	
	C4	0.786	0.918	
	C5	0.835	0.908	
Preoccupied	D1	0.835	0.938	0.947
	D2	0.843	0.936	
	D3	0.899	0.926	
	D4	0.82	0.94	
	D5	0.882	0.93	
Emotional carrying capacity	E1	0.807	0.837	0.889
	E2	0.754	0.857	
	E3	0.739	0.863	
	E4	0.723	0.869	
Tensility	F1	0.718	0.808	0.856
	F2	0.687	0.821	
	F3	0.695	0.817	
	F4	0.693	0.818	

Dimension	Items	Corrected Item- Total Correlation (CITC)	Cronbach's α if Item Deleted	Cronbach's α
Connectivity	G1	0.677	0.798	0.841
	G2	0.683	0.795	
	G3	0.659	0.806	
	G4	0.688	0.795	
Positive regard	H1	0.69	0.807	0.846
	H2	0.75	0.747	
	H3	0.7	0.797	
Mutuality	I1	0.765	0.867	0.895
	I2	0.815	0.847	
	I3	0.692	0.893	
	I4	0.808	0.852	
Ganqing	J1	0.699	0.824	0.86
	J2	0.717	0.816	
	J3	0.701	0.822	
	J4	0.702	0.822	
Renqing	K1	0.674	0.746	0.813
	K2	0.645	0.76	
	K3	0.616	0.773	
	K4	0.596	0.784	
Xinren	L1	0.625	0.592	0.743
	L2	0.605	0.618	
	L3	0.491	0.744	

As shown in Table 7 above, all scales demonstrate high internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.813 to 0.949. These results far exceed the generally accepted threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), thereby increasing the credibility of the survey results and enabling further validity testing.

3.3 Validity Analysis: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a multivariate statistical technique and a fundamental tool for theory evaluation and validating measurement instruments (Marley W. Watkins, 2018; Haig, 2014; Henson and Roberts, 2006; Izquierdo, Olea, and Abad, 2014). EFA commonly assesses the fit between a questionnaire's predefined structure and actual survey data. Before performing EFA in this study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and

Bartlett’s test of sphericity were used to check if the data were suitable for factor analysis.

The results of these two tests are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Results of KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.818
Bartlett’ s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5656.674
	<i>df</i>	1596
	<i>p</i> -value	0.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy for this dataset was 0.818, which is considered “meritorious” according to Kaiser’s criteria (Kaiser, 1974). Additionally, Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 5656.674$, $df = 1596$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, and that the data are suitable for factor analysis (Field, 2024).

Next, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using principal component extraction and a variance-maximizing rotation method to examine the underlying structure of the measurement tool. The results of the analysis showed that, according to the Kaiser criterion, 12 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted. As can be seen in Table 9, these 12 factors have a cumulative explanatory power of 75.346%, which indicates their strong explanatory power and supports the multidimensional structure of the construct in this study.

To examine the issue of common method bias in the data, this study employed Harman’s single-factor test (Harman, 1967). According to this method, if the variance explained by the first factor exceeds 50%, it suggests significant common method bias is present. Unrotated factor analysis was conducted in SPSS 27 and the results showed that the variance explained by the single factor was 27.754%, which is well below the 50% cut-off threshold. Therefore, it can be concluded that the survey data in this study does not exhibit significant common method bias. The specific results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Total Variance Explained by Extracted Factors

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotated Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.820	27.754	27.754	8.992	15.776	15.776
2	6.569	11.525	39.279	4.099	7.191	22.967
3	3.649	6.402	45.681	3.893	6.831	29.798
4	2.522	4.424	50.105	3.251	5.703	35.501
5	2.452	4.302	54.407	3.157	5.538	41.039
6	2.210	3.877	58.284	3.137	5.503	46.542
7	2.095	3.676	61.961	3.119	5.472	52.014
8	1.871	3.283	65.243	2.910	5.105	57.119
9	1.600	2.807	68.050	2.883	5.057	62.176
10	1.494	2.622	70.672	2.789	4.893	67.069
11	1.385	2.430	73.101	2.438	4.277	71.346
12	1.280	2.245	75.346	2.280	4.001	75.346
13	1.066	1.870	77.217	-	-	-
14	0.933	1.637	78.854	-	-	-
15	0.872	1.530	80.384	-	-	-
16	0.765	1.343	81.727	-	-	-
17	0.647	1.135	82.862	-	-	-
18	0.616	1.082	83.944	-	-	-
19	0.600	1.053	84.996	-	-	-
20	0.530	0.931	85.927	-	-	-
21	0.519	0.910	86.837	-	-	-
22	0.480	0.843	87.680	-	-	-
23	0.460	0.808	88.488	-	-	-
24	0.444	0.779	89.267	-	-	-
25	0.399	0.701	89.967	-	-	-
26	0.396	0.696	90.663	-	-	-
27	0.362	0.634	91.297	-	-	-
28	0.360	0.631	91.929	-	-	-
29	0.334	0.586	92.515	-	-	-
30	0.321	0.562	93.078	-	-	-
31	0.290	0.509	93.587	-	-	-
32	0.281	0.493	94.079	-	-	-
33	0.265	0.465	94.544	-	-	-
34	0.248	0.434	94.978	-	-	-
35	0.231	0.406	95.384	-	-	-
36	0.228	0.400	95.784	-	-	-

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotated Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
37	0.224	0.393	96.177	-	-	-
38	0.202	0.354	96.531	-	-	-
39	0.180	0.315	96.847	-	-	-
40	0.172	0.302	97.148	-	-	-
41	0.167	0.293	97.441	-	-	-
42	0.157	0.275	97.716	-	-	-
43	0.147	0.257	97.973	-	-	-
44	0.133	0.233	98.207	-	-	-
45	0.129	0.227	98.433	-	-	-
46	0.110	0.193	98.626	-	-	-
47	0.106	0.187	98.813	-	-	-
48	0.101	0.178	98.991	-	-	-
49	0.094	0.164	99.155	-	-	-
50	0.085	0.149	99.304	-	-	-
51	0.078	0.136	99.440	-	-	-
52	0.070	0.123	99.563	-	-	-
53	0.064	0.112	99.676	-	-	-
54	0.053	0.094	99.769	-	-	-
55	0.051	0.089	99.858	-	-	-
56	0.048	0.084	99.942	-	-	-
57	0.033	0.058	100.000	-	-	-

After extracting the factors, the rotated factor loading matrix (using the varimax method) was examined to determine the primary association of each item with a specific factor. Factor loadings greater than 0.4 were interpreted as significant (Hair et al., 2019; Stevens, 2002). As shown in Table 10, each item exhibited a high loading on its hypothesized factor, and all loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, indicating good construct validity of the measurement model and consistency between item-factor assignments and theoretical expectations.

Table 10: Results of Rotated Factor Loadings

Item	Factor Loadings												Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
A1	0.777													0.694
A2	0.718													0.699
A3	0.766													0.731
A4	0.748													0.678
A5	0.780													0.718
A6	0.772													
A7	0.753													0.700
A8	0.806													0.714
A9	0.768													0.694
A10	0.760													0.721
A11	0.761													0.703
A12	0.749													0.688
B1			0.808											0.834
B2			0.684											0.776
B3			0.784											0.832
B4			0.707											0.814
B5			0.719											0.714
C1	0.813													0.761
C2	0.821													0.839
C3	0.864													0.850
C4	0.790													0.798
C5	0.771													0.809
D1				0.677										0.801
D2				0.704										0.800
D3				0.697										0.860
D4				0.661										0.780
D5				0.719										0.852
E1					0.879									0.837
E2					0.803									0.791
E3					0.811									0.778

Item	Factor Loadings												Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
E4					0.793									0.752
F1						0.785								0.724
F2						0.758								0.698
F3						0.798								0.742
F4						0.774								0.761
G1								0.767						0.743
G2								0.735						0.758
G3								0.664						0.692
G4								0.804						0.734
H1												0.813		0.729
H2												0.811		0.797
H3												0.812		0.766
I1							0.766							0.776
I2							0.784							0.810
I3							0.700							0.708
I4							0.748							0.823
J1									0.795					0.765
J2									0.787					0.793
J3									0.735					0.742
J4									0.701					0.683
K1											0.817			0.766
K2											0.756			0.683
K3											0.666			0.760
K4											0.729			0.676
L1												0.787		0.742
L2												0.808		0.722
L3												0.653		0.613

Notes:

- Item = Questionnaire item or variable
- Factor 1, 2, ... = Extracted factors (principal components)
- Communality = Common variance explained by all factors for the item

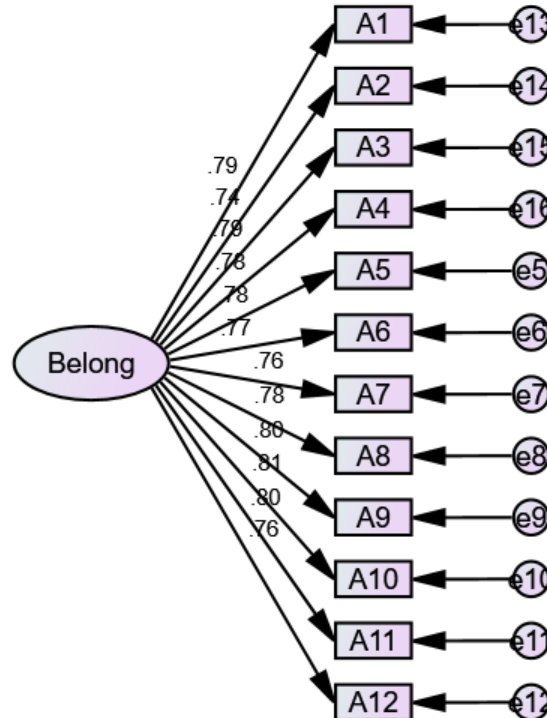
3.4 Validity Analysis: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

After completing the questionnaire's normality test, reliability analysis, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA), this study used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify the theoretical structure of each latent variable measurement model and the fit between indicators, further validating the measurement model's reliability and validity.

3.4.1 Belonging Feeling Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To further validate the measurement model structure of belonging feeling, this study constructed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) path diagram for the scale using AMOS 24. In this study, the belonging feeling was treated as a single higher-order construct to examine its structural validity and overall fit. The specific model path structure is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: CFA Path Diagram for the Belonging Construct



Belonging Feeling Model Fit Evaluation

A After constructing the Confirmatory Factor Analysis path model shown in the figure above, this study evaluated the overall model fit of the Belonging measurement model using commonly accepted Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) criteria. The key fit indices adopted for evaluation are included in every model result table.

A CMIN/df value between 1 and 3 is considered acceptable (Kline, 2023). GFI and AGFI values should be above 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010). A CFI greater than 0.90 indicates good model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). RMSEA below 0.08 is acceptable, and values below 0.06 are ideal (Iacobucci, 2010). Based on standard thresholds, the evaluation results of model fit are shown in the Table 11:

Table 11: Model Fit Indices for the Belonging Construct

Fit Index Category	Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices	GFI	>0.9	0.876	Marginally acceptable
	AGFI	>0.9	0.822	Marginally acceptable
	RMSEA	<0.06	0.08	Marginally acceptable
Incremental Fit Indices	NFI	>0.9	0.913	Acceptable
	IFI	>0.9	0.96	Acceptable
	CFI	>0.9	0.96	Acceptable
	RFI	>0.9	0.893	Marginally acceptable
Parsimony Fit Indices	CMIN/df	<3	1.765	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.5	0.607	Acceptable

Based on the model evaluation results, CMIN/df = 1.765, which is significantly below 3 and indicates good model parsimony. For parsimony fit, PGFI = 0.607 (>0.5), meeting the required standard. Turning to absolute fit indices, GFI = 0.876 and AGFI = 0.822, though slightly below the 0.90 standard, are still within the “acceptable” range. Regarding error approximation, RMSEA = 0.08 is slightly above the ideal value of 0.06, but still within the tolerable range. The incremental fit indices performed exceptionally well: NFI = 0.913, IFI = 0.960, and CFI = 0.960,

all significantly exceeding the recommended value of 0.90. Finally, RFI = 0.893 is slightly below the standard, but remains within the marginally acceptable range.

Belonging Feeling Convergent Validity Test

To further assess the convergent validity of the measurement model, this study focuses on three key indicators of the belonging construct: standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). These indicators are used to evaluate the internal consistency and shared variance among the items within the construct, ensuring that the latent variable is well captured by its observed indicators.

Standardized factor loadings should exceed 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010). CR must be over 0.70, and AVE above 0.50 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 1998). If these are met, the construct has good convergent validity. Table 12 shows the results:

Table 12: Convergent Validity Results for the Belonging Construct

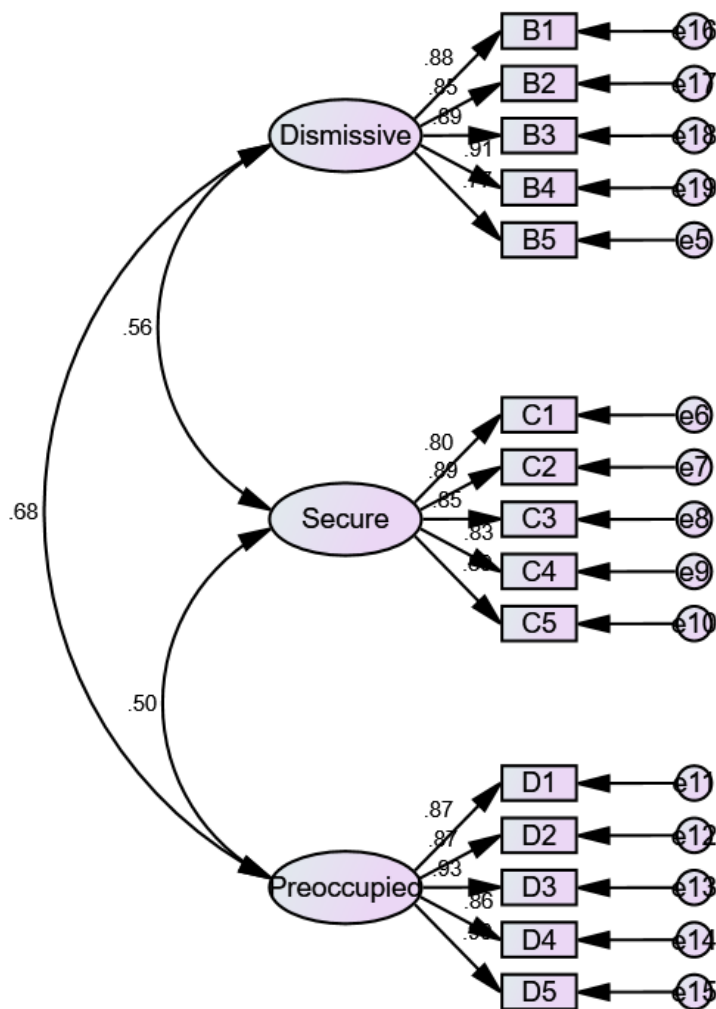
			Estimate	CR	AVE
A1	<---		0.792		
A2	<---		0.745		
A3	<---		0.793		
A4	<---		0.781		
A5	<---		0.78		
A6	<---	Belonging	0.767	0.949290882	0.6095065
A7	<---		0.76		
A8	<---		0.777		
A9	<---		0.799		
A10	<---		0.808		
A11	<---		0.8		
A12	<---		0.764		

The standardized factor loadings of the items measuring the construct of belonging range from 0.745 to 0.808, all of which exceed the recommended threshold of 0.60. The composite reliability (CR) value is 0.949, well above the suggested cutoff of 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) is 0.610, also exceeding the benchmark of 0.50. Taken together, these results indicate that the construct of belonging demonstrates excellent internal consistency and convergent validity in this study.

3.4.2 Attachment Styles Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To further validate the measurement model of the attachment construct, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) path diagram was developed in AMOS. In this study, attachment styles are modeled as a second-order latent construct composed of three subdimensions: secure, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles. The detailed model structure is presented in Figure 6:

Figure 6: CFA Path Diagram for the Attachment Construct



Attachment Styles Model Fit Evaluation

Using the same model fit evaluation criteria as outlined earlier, the model fit indices for the attachment construct are presented in the Table 13:

Table 13: Model Fit Indices for the Attachment Construct

Fit Index Category	Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices	GFI	>0.9	0.853	Marginally acceptable
	AGFI	>0.9	0.797	Marginally acceptable
	RMSEA	<0.06	0.079	Marginally acceptable
Incremental Fit Indices	NFI	>0.9	0.916	Acceptable
	IFI	>0.9	0.962	Acceptable
	CFI	>0.9	0.962	Acceptable
	RFI	>0.9	0.898	Marginally acceptable
Parsimony Fit Indices	CMIN/df	<3	1.743	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.5	0.619	Acceptable

Based on the model evaluation results, CMIN/df = 1.743, significantly below 3, indicating good model parsimony. PGFI = 0.619 (> 0.5), meeting the requirement for parsimonious fit. In terms of absolute fit indices, GFI = 0.853 and AGFI = 0.797, though slightly below the commonly recommended threshold of 0.90, are still within the acceptable range. RMSEA = 0.079 is slightly above the ideal value of 0.06 but remains within a tolerable level. The incremental fit indices performed well: NFI = 0.916, IFI = 0.962, and CFI = 0.962 all exceed the 0.90 benchmark. RFI = 0.898, though just below 0.90, falls within the marginally acceptable range.

Attachment Styles Convergent Validity Test

To assess the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, this study evaluated the standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance

extracted (AVE) for the three first-order latent variables under the attachment construct: dismissive, secure, and preoccupied. The evaluation results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Convergent Validity Results for the Attachment Construct

			Estimate	CR	AVE
B1	<---		0.884		
B2	<---		0.851		
B3	<---	Dismissive	0.89	0.935500785	0.7442062
B4	<---		0.907		
B5	<---		0.775		
C1	<---		0.796		
C2	<---		0.893		
C3	<---	Secure	0.849	0.928980286	0.7238276
C4	<---		0.826		
C5	<---		0.886		
D1	<---		0.865		
D2	<---		0.874		
D3	<---	Preoccupied	0.931	0.947919338	0.7846454
D4	<---		0.858		
D5	<---		0.899		

All factor loadings across the subdimensions are above 0.60, the composite reliability (CR) values exceed 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceed 0.50. These results indicate that the subdimensions demonstrate good internal consistency and convergent validity. In summary, the attachment construct shows excellent convergent validity in this study.

Attachment Styles Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity assesses the extent to which different latent constructs are distinct from one another. In this study, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied to assess the discriminant validity of the attachment construct’s subdimensions. According to this criterion, if the square root of the AVE for a given construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs, then adequate discriminant validity is established (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The specific results are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Discriminant Validity of the Attachment Construct Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

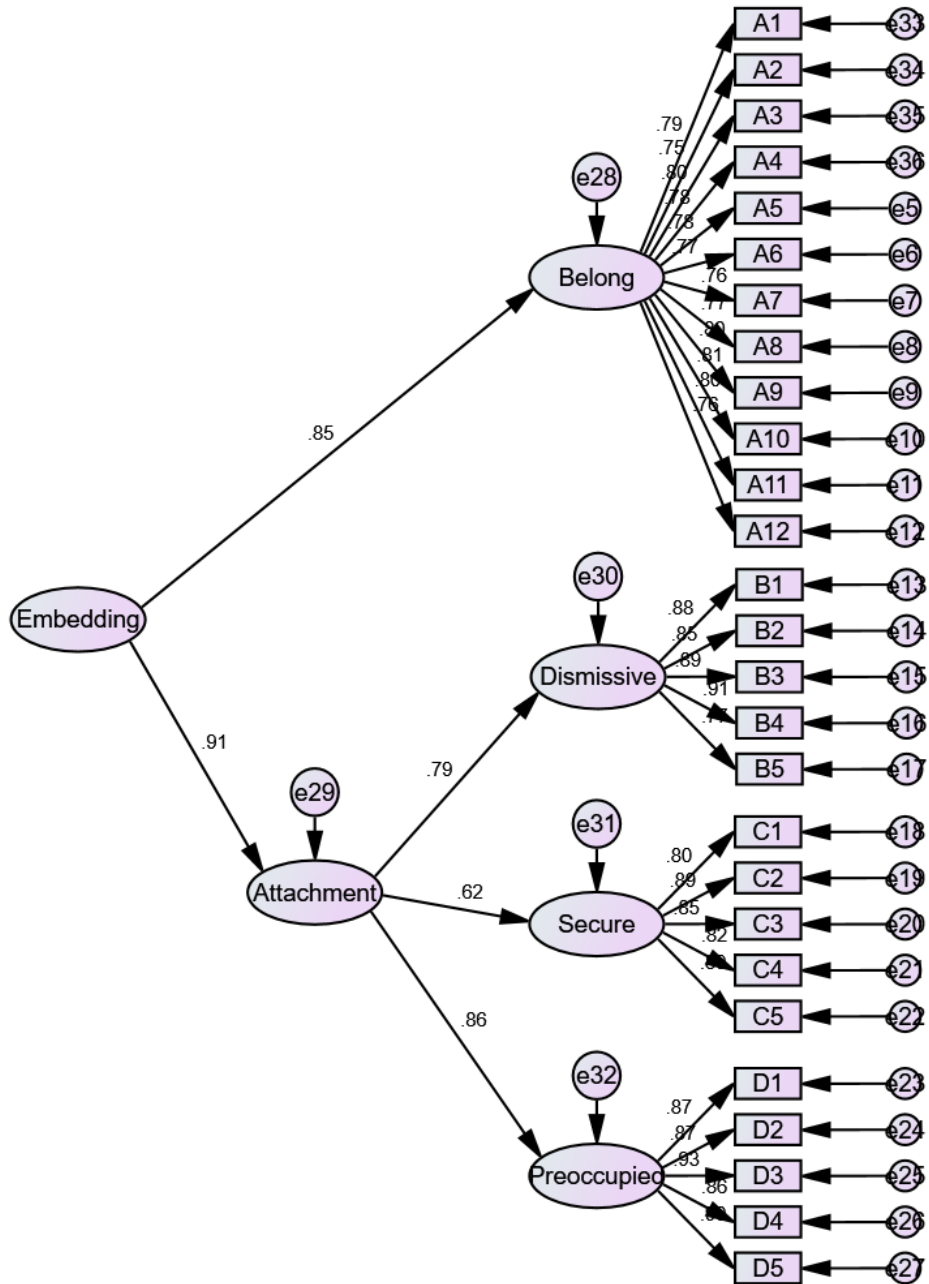
	Dismissive	Secure	Preoccupied
Dismissive	0.863		
Secure	0.561	0.851	
Preoccupied	0.677	0.501	0.886

In Table 15, the diagonal elements represent the square roots of AVE for each construct, while the off-diagonal elements indicate the inter-construct correlation coefficients. As shown, all constructs have square root AVE values that are significantly higher than their correlations with other constructs. For example, the correlation between preoccupied and dismissive is 0.677, which is clearly lower than the square root AVE of preoccupied (0.886). Similarly, the correlation between secure and dismissive is 0.561, which is lower than the respective square root AVEs (0.851 for secure and 0.863 for dismissive). These results indicate that the subdimensions are conceptually distinct, and the model demonstrates good discriminant validity.

3.4.3 Differentiated Embedding Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To further validate the theoretical structure of the differentiated embedding construct, this study conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish the corresponding measurement model. As there is no existing standardized scale for this construct, it was conceptualized as a higher-order latent variable. Two validated constructs, belonging and attachment, were modeled as its first-order latent variables. The specific model structure is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: CFA Path Diagram for the Differentiated Embedding Construct



Differentiated Embedding Model Fit Evaluation

The model fit indices for the second-order model of differentiated embedding are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Model Fit Indices for the Differentiated Embedding Construct

Fit Index Category	Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices	GFI	>0.9	0.771	Marginally acceptable
	AGFI	>0.9	0.729	Marginally acceptable
	RMSEA	<0.06	0.063	Marginally acceptable
Incremental Fit Indices	NFI	>0.9	0.851	Marginally acceptable
	IFI	>0.9	0.946	Acceptable
	CFI	>0.9	0.946	Acceptable
	RFI	>0.9	0.837	Marginally acceptable
Parsimony Fit Indices	CMIN/df	<3	1.483	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.5	0.653	Acceptable

Based on the model evaluation results, CMIN/df = 1.483, which is well below the threshold of 3, indicating a parsimonious model structure with good overall fit. PGFI = 0.653 (> 0.5), meeting the parsimony fit standard. Turning to absolute fit indices, GFI = 0.771 and AGFI = 0.729 are both slightly below the recommended value of 0.90, yet still within the acceptable range. RMSEA is 0.063, marginally above the ideal value of 0.06 but remains within the tolerable range.

Moving to the incremental fit indices, the results show moderate performance: NFI = 0.851 and RFI = 0.837 are slightly below the 0.90 benchmark, falling within the marginally acceptable range. In contrast, IFI = 0.946 and CFI = 0.946 both exceed 0.90, indicating a substantial improvement in model fit compared to the baseline model.

In summary, while some indices fall slightly short of ideal thresholds, the overall model fit of this second-order structure is satisfactory.

Differentiated Embedding Convergent Validity Test

To assess the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, this study evaluated the standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for the two first-order latent variables under the construct of differentiated

embedding (belonging and attachment), as well as for their associated subdimensions. The evaluation results are presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Convergent Validity Results for the Differentiated Embedding Construct

			Estimate	CR	AVE
A1	<---		0.789		
A2	<---		0.75		
A3	<---		0.797		
A4	<---		0.782		
A5	<---		0.777		
A6	<---	Belong	0.768	0.874962841	0.7779125
A7	<---		0.759		
A8	<---		0.773		
A9	<---		0.798		
A10	<---		0.808		
A11	<---		0.8		
A12	<---		0.763		
B1	<---	Dismissive	0.885		
B2	<---		0.85		
B3	<---		0.889	0.805774063	0.584516667
B4	<---		0.908		
B5	<---		0.775		
C1	<---	Secure	0.796		
C2	<---		0.894	0.949236158	0.6092295
C3	<---		0.849		
C4	<---		0.825		
C5	<---		0.885		
D1	<---	Preoccupied	0.866		
D2	<---		0.874		
D3	<---		0.927	0.935505691	0.744227
D4	<---		0.859		
D5	<---		0.903		
Attachment	<---	Embedding	0.911	-	
Belong	<---	Embedding	0.852		
Dismissive	<---	Attachment	0.79		
Secure	<---	Attachment	0.623		
Preoccupied	<---	Attachment	0.861		

The results show that the standardized factor loadings for the belonging construct range from 0.750 to 0.808, with a CR value of 0.875 and an AVE of 0.778. All these values are well above

the commonly accepted thresholds (factor loadings > 0.60 , CR > 0.70 , AVE > 0.50), indicating excellent internal consistency and convergent validity for this construct.

Among the three subdimensions of attachment, the factor loadings for dismissive range from 0.775 to 0.908, with CR = 0.806 and AVE = 0.585, all meeting the recommended standards. For secure, the item loadings range from 0.796 to 0.894, with CR = 0.949 and AVE = 0.609, suggesting strong measurement stability. In the preoccupied subdimension, all item loadings exceed 0.85, with CR = 0.936 and AVE = 0.744, demonstrating particularly strong convergent validity. According to results, both belonging and attachment constructs within workplace exhibit good convergent validity.

Following this assessment of convergent validity, the higher-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) provides strong empirical support for conceptualizing differentiated embedding as a reflective higher-order construct in the Sino-Polish workplace context. As indicated by the standardized second-order loadings, the Differentiated Embedding latent variable is highly related to its first-order dimensions: Attachment ($\lambda = 0.911$) and Belonging ($\lambda = 0.852$), with both coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Loadings above this level are commonly regarded as strong, indicating that more than 50% of the variance in the corresponding indicators can be explained by the underlying factor (Duncan & Dennis, 2008).

Consistent with these CFA results, the high loadings observed for attachment and belonging indicate that these two dimensions are strongly correlated with differentiated embedding in the factor analysis process, reflecting a robust association between the first-order dimensions and the underlying higher-order construct (Duncan & Dennis, 2008). These findings further indicate that attachment and belonging function as two core and closely related first-order dimensions through which differentiated embedding is manifested in the Sino-Polish workplace. In summary, differentiated embedding can be reliably and validly operationalized as a reflective higher-order measurement model composed of attachment and belonging in the workplace context.

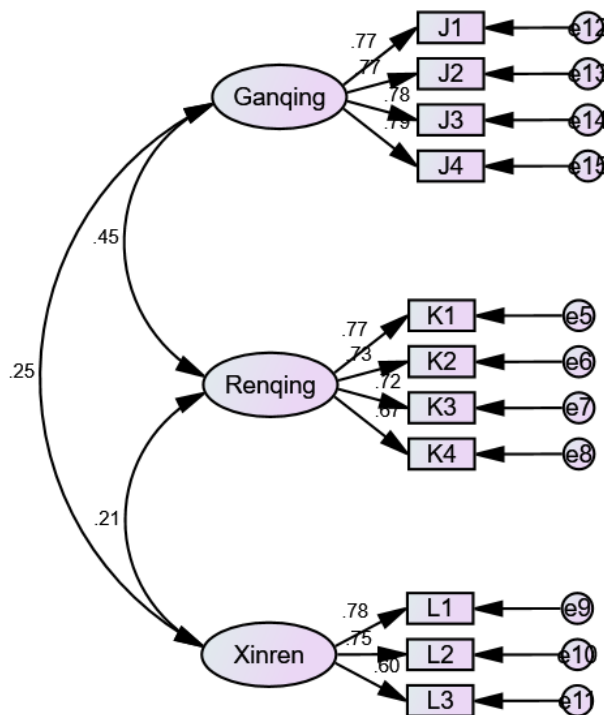
It is important to note that differentiated embedding, as a higher-order latent variable, is composed of belonging and attachment as its reflective first-order dimensions. These two

constructs are not treated as independent parallel variables, but rather as integral components of the overall model structure. Therefore, discriminant validity analysis between belonging feeling and attachment styles is not required. Instead, the study focuses on assessing the convergent validity and overall model fit to confirm the appropriateness and conceptual validity of the higher-order measurement model.

3.4.4 Guanxi Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To further validate the measurement model structure of the Guanxi construct, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) path diagram was developed in AMOS. In this study, Guanxi is modeled as a second-order latent construct consisting of three subdimensions: Ganqing, Renqing, and Xinren. The specific model structure is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: CFA Path Diagram for the Guanxi Construct



Guanxi Model Fit Evaluation

The model fit evaluation results for the Guanxi construct are presented in Table 18.

Table 18: Model Fit Indices for the Guanxi Construct

Fit Index Category	Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices	GFI	>0.9	0.883	Marginally acceptable
	AGFI	>0.9	0.812	Marginally acceptable
Incremental Fit Indices	NFI	>0.9	0.838	Marginally acceptable
	IFI	>0.9	0.903	Acceptable
	CFI	>0.9	0.9	Acceptable
	RFI	>0.9	0.782	Marginally acceptable
Parsimony Fit Indices	CMIN/df	<3	2.248	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.5	0.549	Acceptable

Based on the model evaluation results, CMIN/df = 2.248, which is well below the threshold of 3, indicating a parsimonious model structure with good overall fit. PGFI = 0.549 (> 0.5), meeting the standard for parsimonious fit. Regarding absolute fit indices, GFI = 0.883 and AGFI = 0.812 are slightly below the recommended value of 0.90 but still fall within the acceptable range.

The incremental fit indices show moderate performance: NFI = 0.838 and RFI = 0.782 are slightly below the 0.90 threshold and thus considered marginally acceptable. In contrast, IFI = 0.903 and CFI = 0.900 meet or exceed the recommended value of 0.90, suggesting a notable improvement in model fit compared to the baseline model.

In summary, although some fit indices fall short of ideal benchmarks, the overall model fit of the second order Guanxi construct is considered acceptable.

Guanxi Convergent Validity Test

To assess the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, this study evaluated the standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance

extracted (AVE) for the three subdimensions of the Guanxi construct: Ganqing, Renqing, and Xinren. The evaluation results are presented in Table 19.

Table 19: Convergent Validity Results for the Guanxi Construct

			Estimate	CR	AVE
J1	<---		0.769		
J2	<---		0.773		
J3	<---	Ganqing	0.782	0.859445045	0.6045525
J4	<---		0.786		
K1	<---		0.768		
K2	<---		0.734		
K3	<---	Renqing	0.718	0.814960918	0.524595
K4	<---		0.674		
L1	<---		0.775		
L2	<---	Xinren	0.748	0.751514524	0.505115
L3	<---		0.596		

In summary, all three subdimensions demonstrate good convergent validity. The factor loadings for each subdimension exceed 0.60, the CR values are above 0.70, and the AVE values are greater than 0.50, indicating strong internal consistency and convergent validity across the constructs. These results provide a solid measurement foundation for the subsequent construction of the second order Guanxi model.

Guanxi Discriminant Validity Test

To assess the discriminant validity among the three first-order constructs: Ganqing, Renqing, and Xinren, this study continue use the Fornell–Larcker criterion in Table 20:

Table 20: Discriminant Validity of the Guanxi Construct Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	Ganqing	Renqing	Xinren
Ganqing	0.778		
Renqing	0.454	0.724	
Xinren	0.246	0.214	0.711

As shown in the table 20, the square root of AVE for Ganqing is 0.778, which is substantially higher than its correlations with Renqing (0.454) and Xinren (0.246). The square root of AVE for Renqing is 0.724, also exceeding its correlations with Ganqing (0.454) and

Xinren (0.214). Similarly, the square root of AVE for Xinren is 0.711, which is greater than its correlations with Ganqing (0.246) and Renqing (0.214).

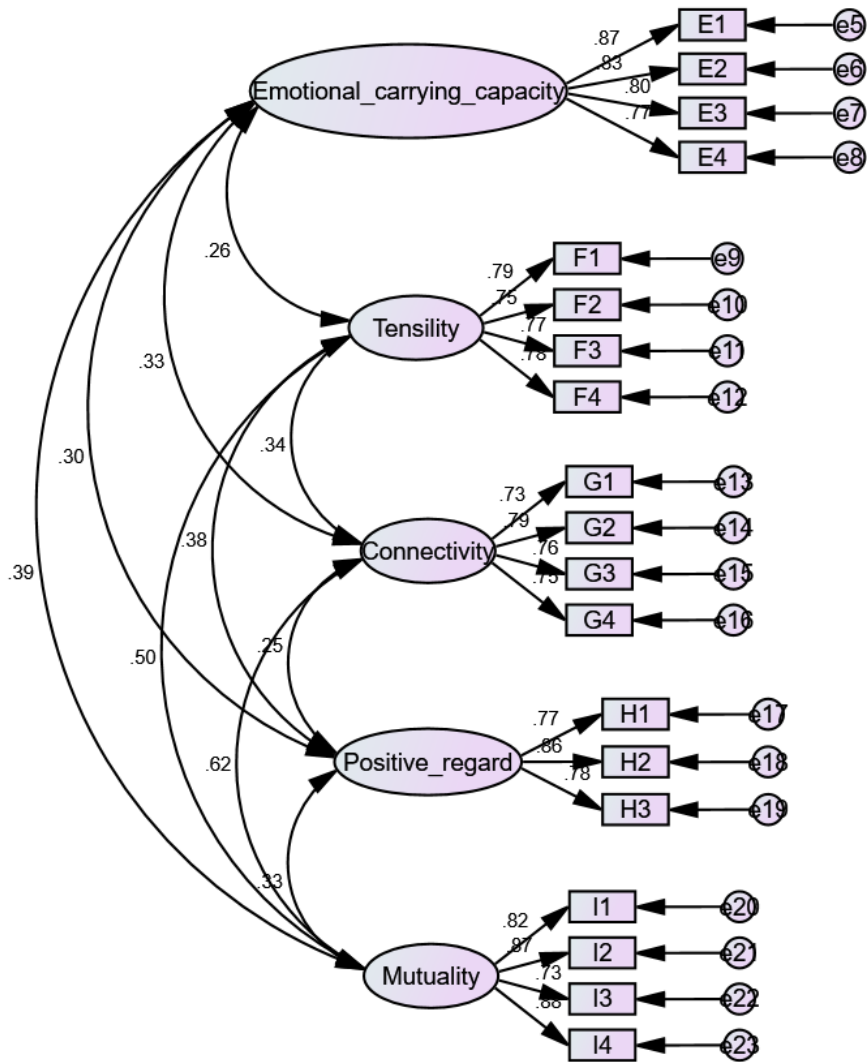
In summary, all three subdimensions meet the Fornell–Larcker criterion, indicating that the internal dimensions of the Guanxi construct exhibit good discriminant validity and are conceptually distinct from one another.

3.4.5 High-Quality Connection Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, a measurement model was constructed for the dependent variable high-quality connections (HQC), as shown in Figure 8.

To further validate the measurement structure of the high-quality connection construct, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) path diagram was developed in AMOS. In this study, high-quality connection is modeled as a second-order latent construct comprising five subdimensions: emotional carrying capacity, tensility, connectivity, positive regard, and mutuality. The detailed model structure is illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Path Diagram for the High-Quality Connections Construct



High-Quality Connection Model Fit Evaluation

The model fit indices for the high-quality connection construct are presented in Table 21.

Table 21: Model Fit Indices for the High-Quality Connections Construct

Fit Index Category	Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Observed Value	Acceptability
Absolute Fit Indices	GFI	>0.9	0.83	Marginally acceptable
	AGFI	>0.9	0.772	Marginally acceptable
	RMSEA	<0.06	0.082	Marginally acceptable
Incremental Fit Indices	NFI	>0.9	0.825	Marginally acceptable
	IFI	>0.9	0.913	Acceptable
	CFI	>0.9	0.911	Acceptable
	RFI	>0.9	0.789	Marginally acceptable
Parsimony Fit Indices	CMIN/df	<3	1.809	Acceptable
	PGFI	>0.5	0.62	Acceptable

Based on the model evaluation results, CMIN/df = 1.809, which is well below the threshold of 3, indicating a parsimonious model structure with good overall fit. PGFI = 0.620 (> 0.5), meeting the standard for parsimonious fit. Regarding absolute fit indices, GFI = 0.830 and AGFI = 0.772 do not reach the ideal cutoff of 0.90 but remain within the acceptable range. RMSEA = 0.082 is slightly above the recommended value of 0.06, yet still within the tolerable range.

For incremental fit indices, NFI = 0.825 and RFI = 0.789 are slightly below the 0.90 threshold, thus considered marginally acceptable. In contrast, IFI = 0.913 and CFI = 0.911 exceed the recommended value of 0.90, indicating substantial improvement in model fit compared to the baseline model

High-Quality Connection Convergent Validity Test

To assess the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, this study evaluated the standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) for the five first-order latent variables under the high-quality connection construct. The evaluation results are presented in Table 22.

Table 22: Convergent Validity Results for the High-Quality Connections Construct

		Estimate	CR	AVE
E1	<---	0.869		
E2	<---	0.827	0.889467879	0.66841375
E3	<---	0.802		
E4	<---	0.769		
F1	<---	0.792		
F2	<---	0.753	0.85574126	0.59734075
F3	<---	0.769		
F4	<---	0.777		
G1	<---	0.726		
G2	<---	0.792	0.841927229	0.5713415
G3	<---	0.755		
G4	<---	0.749		
H1	<---	0.768		
H2	<---	0.863	0.847340598	0.649749667
H3	<---	0.784		
I1	<---	0.823		
I2	<---	0.872	0.898155813	0.6890395
I3	<---	0.734		
I4	<---	0.883		

The evaluation results indicate that the standardized factor loadings for all subdimensions exceed 0.60, the CR values are above 0.70, and the AVE values are greater than 0.50, meeting the criteria for convergent validity as proposed by Hair et al. (2010) and Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Specifically, for emotional carrying capacity, the factor loadings range from 0.769 to 0.869, with a CR value of 0.889 and an AVE of 0.668. For tensility, the loadings range from 0.753 to 0.792, with CR = 0.856 and AVE = 0.597. The factor loadings for connectivity range from 0.726 to 0.792, with CR = 0.842 and AVE = 0.571. For positive regard, the loadings range from 0.768 to 0.863, with CR = 0.847 and AVE = 0.650. Lastly, the loadings for mutuality fall between 0.734 and 0.883, with CR = 0.898 and AVE = 0.689.

In summary, all five subdimensions of high-quality connection demonstrate excellent convergent validity, with strong internal consistency and satisfactory construct reliability.

High-Quality Connection Discriminant Validity Test

To assess the discriminant validity among the five first-order latent variables under the high-quality connection construct, this study still applied the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The results are presented in Table 23.

Table 23: Discriminant Validity of the High-Quality Connections Construct Based on the Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	Emotional carrying capacity	Tensility	Connectivity	Positive regard	Mutuality
Emotional carrying capacity	0.818				
Tensility	0.260	0.773			
Connectivity	0.335	0.340	0.756		
Positive regard	0.302	0.381	0.253	0.806	
Mutuality	0.392	0.503	0.618	0.329	0.830

The square root of AVE for emotional carrying capacity is 0.818, which is greater than its correlations with tensility (0.260), connectivity (0.335), positive regard (0.302), and mutuality (0.392). For tensility, the square root of AVE is 0.773, which also exceeds its correlations with all other constructs. Similarly, the square root of AVE for connectivity is 0.756, higher than its correlations with other subdimensions. The square root of AVE for positive regard is 0.806, significantly greater than its correlations with the remaining constructs. Lastly, the square root of AVE for mutuality is 0.830, again exceeding its correlations with all other subdimensions.

In summary, the correlations among the five subdimensions of high-quality connection are all lower than the square root of their respective AVEs, indicating good discriminant validity in accordance with the Fornell–Larcker criterion. These results further support the theoretical distinctiveness and structural soundness of the measurement model.

Overall, the measurement models for all independent and dependent variables in this study demonstrated satisfactory levels of reliability and validity, as verified through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Although some absolute fit indices (such as GFI, AGFI, and RMSEA) and a few incremental fit indices (such as RFI and NFI) only reached the “acceptable” or “marginally acceptable” range, these outcomes remain within a reasonable scope given the

characteristics of the current data, which include a relatively small sample size and a complex structure involving multiple subdimensions. The overall model fit remains adequate, suggesting a stable structure and a reasonable degree of theoretical explanatory power.

Notably, the convergent validity of each variable is particularly strong. All standardized factor loadings exceed the commonly recommended threshold of 0.60. The composite reliability (CR) values are generally above 0.80, reflecting high internal consistency, while the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceed 0.50, further supporting the convergent validity of the measurement instruments. At the same time, the results of discriminant validity testing based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion were also favorable, with the square roots of AVE for each construct significantly exceeding their correlations with other constructs. This indicates strong theoretical independence and clear conceptual boundaries among the latent variables.

However, it is important to note that the sample in this study consists of Chinese self-initiated expatriates working in Poland, the small sample size limits the statistical power of the SEM path analysis and may hinder accurate identification of causality between variables. This concludes the discussion on the measurement models' reliability and validity. The next phase will use regression analysis to further examine relationships among variables.

Despite the shift in analytical strategy, the systematic validation of the measurement models described above has laid a solid conceptual and methodological foundation for the study. This foundation is crucial for ensuring the interpretability and credibility of the subsequent empirical analysis.

3.5 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Building on the preceding analysis, which confirmed the scales' reliability and validity, this section proceeds to examine the correlations among the main variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the linear relationships between variables. The coefficient ranges from -1 to 1, with values of -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation, 1 indicating a perfect positive correlation, and 0 indicating no significant linear association. Importantly, the Pearson

coefficient reflects both the strength and direction of the relationship, making it a widely accepted and effective statistical approach for evaluating associations between variables (Schober, Boer, and Schwarte, 2018).

The results of the correlation analysis for the four principal variables: belonging, attachment, high-quality connections, and Guanxi, are summarized in Table 24, highlighting their significant linear associations.

Table 24: Pearson Correlation Matrix for the Four Principal Variables

	Belonging	Attachment	Quality Connections	Guanxi
Belonging	1			
Attachment	0.660***	1		
High-Quality Connections	0.282**	0.327***	1	
Guanxi	0.253**	0.398***	0.600***	1

Table 24 shows that all four variables are significantly and positively correlated, with most correlations reaching high levels of significance ($p < 0.01$ or $p < 0.001$). Notably, the correlation coefficient between Attachment and Belonging is the highest ($r = 0.660$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a strong synergistic relationship between these two dimensions in cross-cultural workplaces. In other words, Chinese employees who experience a stronger emotional attachment in the workplace also tend to feel a greater sense of belonging. This finding is consistent with the core proposition of differentiated embedding theory, which posits that a positive embedding process enables employees to experience both attachment and belonging simultaneously.

The significant correlation between Attachment and High-Quality Connections ($r = 0.327$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that higher emotional attachment is associated with stronger high-quality interpersonal connections in Sino-Polish workplaces. Similarly, the correlation between Belonging and High-Quality Connections ($r = 0.282$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that a greater sense of belonging is associated with more positive, stable, and high-quality connections among employees.

Especially, the correlation coefficient between Guanxi and High-Quality Connections was 0.600 ($p < 0.001$), which is the highest among all observed correlations. The data from this study also clearly show that the effective operation of Guanxi can significantly enhance

relationship quality in the Sino-Polish workplace, confirming the strong consistency between theoretical expectations and empirical realities.

Additionally, the correlation coefficient between Attachment and Guanxi is 0.398 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that strong Guanxi can further strengthen attachment feelings among Chinese expatriate employees. Conversely, positive attachment experiences also contribute to expanding and consolidating an individual's Guanxi network. This bidirectional mechanism reinforces the depth of embeddedness and the foundation of interactive trust in cross-cultural workplaces.

Although the correlation between Belonging and Guanxi is relatively low ($r = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$), it is still significant. This indicates that a firm Guanxi network can provide individuals with a sense of belonging and social support, while a strong sense of belonging can also enhance employees' motivation and capacity to develop and maintain Guanxi within the organization. Overall, this result further extends the applicability and explanatory power of differentiated embedding theory in the Sino-Polish workplace context.

After conducting an initial analysis of the overall correlations among the core main effect variables, it is necessary to expand the perspective from the overall structure to the internal sub-dimensions of each variable to reveal more nuanced experiences of Chinese employees within cross-cultural workplace relationship networks. Therefore, subsequent analyses will further refine the correlations among the sub-dimensions within Attachment, High-Quality Connections, and Guanxi. Through this hierarchical progression, this study not only validates the internal consistency and synergistic effects across the main dimensions but also deepens understanding of how each construct manifests and operates in workplace interactions. This analytical strategy helps to concretize and refine abstract theoretical frameworks. It provides detailed data to support an understanding of the mechanisms of the Sino-Polish workplace relationship.

Table 25: Pearson Correlation Matrix for the Sub-dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Dismissive (1)	1										
Secure (2)	0.524**	1									
Preoccupied (3)	0.636**	0.470**	1								
Emotional carrying capacity (4)	0.122	0.044	0.190*	1							
Tensility (5)	0.213*	0.233*	0.259**	0.219*	1						
Connectivity (6)	0.248*	0.268*	0.214*	0.295*	0.275*	1					
Positive regard (7)	0.032	0.158	0.147	0.263*	0.322**	0.216*	1				
Mutuality (8)	0.237*	0.171	0.257**	0.360**	0.451**	0.523**	0.286*	1			
Ganqing (9)	0.226*	0.234*	0.224*	0.221*	0.351**	0.421**	0.341**	0.473**	1		
Renqing (10)	0.262*	0.246*	0.190*	0.182*	0.298**	0.381**	0.242*	0.334**	0.378**	1	
Xinren (11)	0.316**	0.150	0.282**	0.244*	0.155	0.173	0.279*	0.274*	0.226*	0.200*	1

Correlation matrix in Table 25 reveals the bivariate linear relationships among 11 variables, spanning three core constructs: Attachment (Dismissive, Secure, Preoccupied), High-Quality Connections (Emotional Carrying Capacity, Tensility, Connectivity, Positive Regard, Mutuality), and Guanxi (Ganqing, Renqing, Xinren). Overall, most of these variables demonstrate statistically significant positive correlations.

Specifically, from the perspective of Attachment style, the three subtypes: Dismissive, Secure, and Preoccupied, are all highly positively correlated with one another. Markedly, the correlation between Dismissive and Preoccupied is the highest ($r = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that even though these attachment styles may represent tendencies toward avoidance and conflict, they still display substantial internal consistency across cultural contexts. This result indicates that employees' attachment styles are interrelated in complex ways and cannot be reduced to static or mutually exclusive categories.

Further examination of the specific associations between the three attachment styles and high-quality connections and Guanxi reveals that their effects are distinct. Dismissive attachment is significantly positively correlated with Connectivity ($r = 0.248$, $p < 0.01$), Tensility ($r = 0.213$, $p < 0.05$), and Mutuality ($r = 0.237$, $p < 0.01$), but also with Ganqing ($r = 0.226$, $p < 0.05$), Renqing ($r = 0.262$, $p < 0.01$), and Xinren ($r = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$). These results suggest that dismissive attachment style does not necessarily imply a lack of social embeddedness in the workplace; on the contrary, some employees may instead establish higher levels of relational resources through independence.

Secure attachment style, representing positive attachment styles, showed significant correlations with high-quality connection subdimensions: Tensility ($r = 0.233$, $p < 0.05$), Connectivity ($r = 0.268$, $p < 0.01$), and Mutuality ($r = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$). It also correlated with Ganqing ($r = 0.234$, $p < 0.01$) and Renqing ($r = 0.246$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation with Xinren was limited. These results suggest that secure attachment facilitates building relationship networks, especially in reciprocity and resilience. However, its direct role in building trust needs further investigation.

Preoccupied attachment style was significantly positively correlated with high-quality connection dimensions such as Tensility ($r = 0.259, p < 0.01$), Connectivity ($r = 0.214, p < 0.05$), and Mutuality ($r = 0.257, p < 0.01$), while also showing positive correlations with Ganqing ($r = 0.224, p < 0.05$), Renqing ($r = 0.190, p < 0.05$), and Xinren ($r = 0.282, p < 0.01$), indicating that preoccupied attachment style can still obtain support and trust from coworker relationship in the actual workplace.

Focusing on the relationship between Guanxi and its three major dimensions, as well as high-quality connections, the data is particularly impressive. Ganqing and Mutuality ($r = 0.473, p < 0.001$), Connectivity ($r = 0.421, p < 0.001$), Tensility ($r = 0.351, p < 0.001$), and Positive Regard ($r = 0.341, p < 0.001$), the results show a highly significant positive correlation, indicating that a strong emotional foundation can effectively promote reciprocity, connectivity, and relationship resilience among team members. Renqing is positively correlated with connectivity ($r = 0.381, p < 0.001$), Tensility ($r = 0.298, p < 0.001$), Mutuality ($r = 0.334, p < 0.001$), and Positive Regard ($r = 0.242, p < 0.01$) all showed positive correlations, highlighting the Renqing in collaboration, mutual assistance, and emotional support.

It is worth noting that although Xinren shows significant positive correlations with sub-dimensions such as Mutuality ($r = 0.274, p < 0.01$) and Positive Regard ($r = 0.279, p < 0.01$), the correlation coefficients and statistical significance are slightly lower than those for Ganqing and Renqing. This phenomenon suggests that Xinren, as the deepest and most implicit mechanism in Guanxi networks, typically relies on long-term interaction and frequent emotional exchange to establish itself, making it difficult to manifest quickly through short-term emotional expression or interpersonal interactions. Therefore, team members are more likely to use Ganqing and Renqing to build cooperative bridges in the early stages. At the same time, the accumulation and manifestation of Xinren are more context- and process-dependent.

After comprehensively analyzing the correlations among the main variables and their sub-dimensions, this study preliminarily validated the existence of stable and significant positive relationships among the constructs in the theoretical model. However, correlation analysis alone is insufficient to reveal the causal relationships and pathways between variables. To

further clarify the independent predictive effects of each variable on the dependent variable and to explore the moderating mechanisms of Guanxi across different psychological resources and relationship quality, the next step will involve conducting multiple linear regression analyses to test key path relationships and interaction effects.

3.6 Regression Analysis

This study uses multiple linear regression analysis to test the proposed hypotheses and answer research questions. The analysis examines how attachment, belonging, differentiated embedding, and Guanxi influence the construction of high-quality connections among Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees in Poland. H1 and H2 assess the direct effects of attachment and belonging on high-quality connections. H3 tests the predictive effect of differentiated embedding. For H4a, H4b, and H5, the study examines the main and moderating effects of Guanxi. By introducing main and interaction effects step by step, the study assesses the independent and interactive effects of each core variable. This process validates the research hypotheses.

First, a regression analysis was conducted, treating differentiated embedding as the independent variable and high-quality connections as the dependent variable, to specify their relationship and test H3.

Table 26: Regression Analysis for the Effect of Differentiated Embedding on High-Quality

Connections

	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t	p	VIF	Tolerance
Constant	2.810	0.212	-	13.247	0.000***	-	-
Embedding	0.242	0.062	0.334	3.869	0.000***	1.000	1.000

Model summary:

- $R^2 = 0.112$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.104$
- $F(1, 119) = 14.971$, $p = 0.000$
- Durbin-Watson = 1.355

Dependent variable: High-Quality Connections

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

As shown in Table 26, the regression results indicate that differentiated embedding has a significant positive predictive effect on high-quality connections ($B = 0.242$, $SE = 0.062$, $\beta = 0.334$, $t = 3.869$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that in a cross-cultural workplace environment, Chinese self-initiated expatriates who are better able to achieve embedding are more likely to establish stable, positive, and high-quality relationship networks at work. In other words, a positive differentiated embedding process does help to build better positive interpersonal relationships.

The coefficient of determination R^2 for this regression model is 0.112, and the adjusted R^2 is 0.104, indicating that embedding explains approximately 11.2% of the variance in high-quality connections. The F-test results are significant ($F(1, 119) = 14.971$, $p < 0.001$), further validating the model's overall statistical validity. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicate that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is 1.000 and the tolerance is 1.000, ruling out multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson statistic is 1.355, indicating no severe autocorrelation issues.

In summary, the results provide strong support for Hypothesis 3. Differentiated embedding serves as an important independent variable in promoting high-quality connections relationship building among Chinese self-initiated expatriate employees in cross-cultural contexts. Its practical significance and theoretical implications are strongly supported by empirical evidence in the analysis results. These findings further emphasize that enhancing employees' embedded experiences in the Sino-Polish workplace can facilitate the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships.

Following this, two moderation effect models are established to test Hypotheses: H1, H2, H4a, H4b, and H5. The models aim to investigate the effects of attachment and belonging on high-quality connections, the moderating influence of Guanxi on these relationships, and the direct impact of Guanxi on high-quality connections.

Firstly, with high-quality connections as the dependent variable, the focus will be on the moderating effect of Guanxi as a skill on the relationship between attachment and high-quality connections. Aiming to reveal how individual attachment feelings affect the construction of high-quality workplace relationships at different levels of Guanxi. The results can be seen in Table 27:

Table 27: Regression Analysis with the Interaction Term (Attachment × Guanxi) Predicting High-Quality Connections

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.601*** (63.304)	3.601 (75.030) ***	3.538 (69.891) ***
Attachment	0.220*** (3.780)	0.071 (1.323)	0.063 (1.214)
Guanxi		0.570 (7.012) ***	0.622 (7.749) ***
Attachment × Guanxi			0.250 (3.077) **
N	121	121	121
R²	0.107	0.370	0.417
Adjusted R²	0.100	0.359	0.402
F	14.286***	34.618***	27.891***
ΔR²	0.107	0.263	0.047
ΔF	14.286***	49.167***	9.469**

Dependent variable: High-Quality Connections

Notes:

- Values in parentheses are t-statistics.
- *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
- N = sample size
- ΔR² and ΔF represent the change in R² and F from the previous model

This section examines the moderating effect of Guanxi as a skill on the relationship between attachment and high-quality connections. The results show that in Model 1, which includes only attachment, its effect on relationship quality is significant and positive ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.001$). This result provides empirical support for Hypothesis 1, preliminarily validating the key role of attachment among Chinese employees in the construction of high-quality workplace relationships in a Sino-Polish cultural workplace.

In Model 2, Guanxi is introduced, leading to a significant increase in R^2 from 0.107 to 0.370. The main effect of Guanxi is highly significant ($\beta = 0.570$, $p < 0.001$). After including Guanxi, the influence of attachment weakens and turns insignificant. These results suggest that Guanxi becomes the dominant predictor of high-quality connections. Employees with higher levels of Guanxi are more likely to build positive, stable, high-quality connection networks, regardless of their attachment style. This highlights Guanxi's positive moderating role in high-quality connections. Overall, the findings provide strong empirical support for Hypothesis 5 and confirm Guanxi's powerful positive impact on the formation of high-quality connections.

After introducing the attachment \times Guanxi interaction term in Model 3, the interaction effect is significant ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.01$), showing that Guanxi positively moderates the relationship between attachment and high-quality connections. In settings with higher Guanxi, the positive effect of attachment on high-quality connections is stronger. The model's explanatory power also improves. R^2 rises from 0.370 to 0.417, and $\Delta F = 9.469$ ($p = 0.003$) supports the statistical significance of this moderating effect. Overall, this group of models shows a good fit (adjusted $R^2 = 0.402$). The results provide robust empirical support for Hypothesis 4a and empirically validate Guanxi's moderating effect as a skill on the relationship between attachment and high-quality connections.

Second, with high-quality connections as the dependent variable, this study examines the moderating effect of belonging on Guanxi. The goal is to show how a sense of belonging affects high-quality relationships in the Sino-Polish workplace across different Guanxi levels. These results can be seen in Table 28:

Table 28: Regression Analysis with the Interaction Term (Belonging \times Guanxi) Predicting High-Quality Connections

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.601 (62.355) ***	3.601 (75.561) ***	3.553 (77.009) ***
Belonging	0.183 (3.212) **	0.090 (1.858)	0.064 (1.400)
Guanxi		0.576 (7.533) ***	0.618 (8.534) ***
Belonging \times Guanxi			0.288 (4.149) ***
N	121	121	121
R²	0.080	0.379	0.458
Adjusted R²	0.072	0.368	0.444
F	10.319 **	35.948 ***	32.995 ***
ΔR^2	0.080	0.299	0.080
ΔF	10.319 **	56.743 ***	17.211 ***

Dependent variable: High-Quality Connections

Notes:

- Values in parentheses are t-statistics.
- * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
- N = sample size
- ΔR^2 and ΔF represent the change in R^2 and F from the previous model

This section examines the moderating effect of Guanxi as a skill on the relationship between belonging and high-quality connections. Model 1 shows that belonging significantly and positively affects relationship quality ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.01$), indicating employees with stronger feelings of belonging are more likely to establish high-quality workplace networks. These results support Hypothesis 2, demonstrating that Chinese self-initiated expatriates with a stronger sense of belonging tend to build higher-quality workplace connections.

After Guanxi is introduced in Model 2, the model's explanatory power improves (R^2 rises from 0.080 to 0.379), and Guanxi's main effect remains highly significant ($\beta = 0.576$, $p < 0.001$),

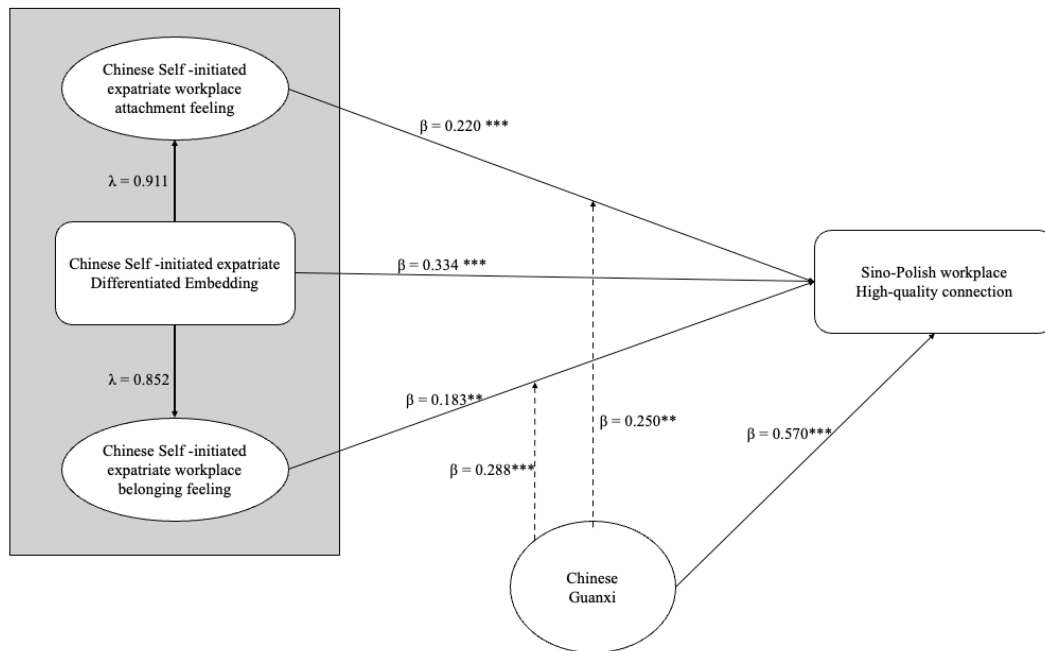
consistent with the Attachment model. This confirms that Guanxi is a key predictor of high-quality connections, and its positive effect on relationship quality becomes clearer when treated as a relational skill. Overall, these findings support Hypothesis 5, reaffirming Guanxi's strong positive influence on high-quality connections.

After introducing the Belonging \times Guanxi interaction term, Model 3 reveals a significant interaction effect ($\beta = 0.288, p < 0.001$). This suggests that Guanxi not only directly promotes high-quality connections but also strengthens the positive impact of Belonging on relationship quality. In contexts with higher Guanxi levels, the role of Belonging in fostering high-quality relationships is more pronounced. Model explanatory power improves ($R^2 = 0.458$), and $\Delta F = 17.211$ ($p < 0.001$) supports the moderation effect. The regression models fit well (adjusted $R^2 = 0.444$), providing strong support for Hypothesis 4b and confirming Guanxi's importance for Chinese self-initiated expatriates in forming high-quality connections with Polish employees. Guanxi independently promotes connection quality and significantly amplifies belonging's positive effects on cross-cultural relationship quality.

3.7 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

In summary, the regression analysis confirmed the main path relationships outlined in the theoretical framework for study 1. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in study 1 showed that attachment feelings and belonging feelings together form the differentiated embedding variable at the workplace, eliminating the need for separate regressions for these two, as they are modeled as components of a higher-order construct. Multiple regression and moderation analyses clarified the relationships among the remaining variables in the model. The full set of relationships is depicted in Figure 10 below:

Figure 10: Diagram of Direct and Moderation Effects in Hypothesis Verification



Notes:

- λ represents standardized factor loadings from the higher-order measurement model.
- β represents standardized regression coefficients from SPSS hierarchical regression analyses.
- Solid lines indicate direct effects; dashed lines indicate significant moderation (interaction) effects.
- * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

This quantitative study focuses on the construction of high-quality relationships among Chinese self-initiated expatriates' feelings in Sino-Polish workplaces and proposes and tests the hypotheses. The results of the regression analysis provide strong empirical support for the hypotheses.

First, H1 posits that the attachment feelings of Chinese self-initiated expatriates positively affect high-quality relationships. Empirical results demonstrate a significant positive impact of attachment feelings on high-quality connections ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the stronger the attachment feelings experienced, the greater the likelihood of establishing positive interpersonal relationships with Polish coworkers.

H2 posits that the feeling of belonging has a positive affect on high-quality relationships. The analysis shows that the feeling of belonging also has a significant positive impact on high-quality connections ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.01$), further confirming the importance of “sense of

belonging” as a fundamental psychological need for Chinese self-initiated expatriates and its influence on establishing positive work relationships.

H3 focuses on the role of Differentiated embedding. The results show that embedding has a significant positive effect on high-quality connections ($\beta = 0.334, p < 0.001$), indicating that Chinese self-initiated expatriates who achieve embedding more effectively are more likely to gain recognition and support in the cross-cultural workplace, thereby forming a stable interpersonal network (Ryan, 2018). A positive embedding process has a profound impact on the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships.

H4a and H4b further examine the moderating effect of Guanxi. The data indicate that Guanxi plays a significant positive moderating role in the relationships between Attachment feeling and high-quality connections (interaction term $\beta = 0.250, p < 0.01$) and between Belonging feeling and high-quality connections (interaction term $\beta = 0.288, p < 0.001$). These results suggest that Guanxi not only amplifies the positive effects of attachment feelings and belonging feelings on high-quality relationships, but also that good Guanxi skills are a crucial contextual resource for enhancing relationship quality in the Chinese cultural context (Chen and Chen, 2004). This conclusion is equally applicable in the Sino-Polish cultural setting.

The results support H5, revealing that Guanxi has a highly significant predictive effect on high-quality connections in both the Attachment model and the Belonging model ($\beta = 0.570$ – $0.576, p < 0.001$), highlighting the decisive role of Guanxi as a social skill in the work environment of Chinese organizations and individuals. Employees with good Guanxi skill are more likely to receive support and experience positive emotions in Sino-Polish workplaces.

In addition to the hypothesis testing results, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results presented in the model figure provide empirical evidence for the measurement validity of differentiated embedding in the workplace context. Given the absence of a standardized scale for assessing differentiated embedding in workplace settings, the construct was operationalized through its two core experiential dimensions: attachment and workplace belonging. The higher-order CFA results show that differentiated embedding in the workplace loads strongly on attachment ($\lambda = 0.911$) and belonging ($\lambda = 0.852$), indicating that both dimensions reliably and

consistently reflect differentiated embedding construct as experienced in Sino-Polish workplace.

Overall, these empirical results fully support the theoretical assumptions of this study's quantitative design. They systematically reveal the multiple influence pathways of attachment feeling, belonging feeling, differentiated embedding, and Guanxi on the construction of high-quality relationships, while emphasizing the main and moderating effects of Guanxi in cross-cultural workplaces. The quantitative analysis not only provides solid empirical support for the hypothesis and clarifies the relationships among key variables but also highlights the need for a deeper understanding. To address this, the parallel qualitative study complements these findings by exploring the underlying mechanisms, contextual meanings, and interactional processes. Building on these results, the next chapter presents interviews with Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees to deepen understanding of how positive relationships are established in the Sino-Polish workplace.

Chapter 4: Qualitative Study Findings and Triangulation via Joint Displays

This section presents the main findings of the qualitative study. Through thematic analysis, the study investigates how Chinese and Polish coworkers embed themselves in the Sino-Polish workplace, the perspectives of both sides' employees, and the mechanisms of cross-cultural relationship building. As described earlier, both deductive and inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014) were used to draw on existing theoretical frameworks and to identify new themes from participant narratives. A two-stage coding strategy was applied. First, deductive coding structured the analysis around the study's research themes and core theories: differentiated embedding (Ryan, 2018), high-quality connections (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003), and Chinese Guanxi. Next, inductive in vivo coding identified additional themes emerging directly from participants' accounts. This combined approach ensured both theoretical consistency and sensitivity to unique cross-cultural experiences.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen employees in Sino-Polish workplaces. This sample size ensured theoretical saturation for each research theme. Interviews were conducted in English with Polish employees and in Chinese with Chinese employees; subsequently, all data were translated for coding and comparison. Coded data were organized into themes and sub-categories aligned with the study's aims and literature review. The following sections present these findings in detail.

The qualitative analysis is structured around three thematic categories, each designed to uncover insights relevant to the research questions by examining participants' experiences, narratives, and relational dynamics from both Chinese and Polish perspectives.

4.1 Category: Embedding Process Capture

This section adopts Ryan's (2018) framework to examine the embedding experiences of Chinese and Polish employees in cross-cultural workplaces. While the quantitative analysis has thoroughly investigated Chinese self-initiated expatriates' senses of belonging and attachment, the qualitative phase further explores how dynamic processes interplay in everyday experiences.

The process of embedding in a cross-cultural workplace unfolds not as a linear progression, but as an ongoing journey shaped by a series of interconnected moments and encounters. As highlighted in Ryan's (2014) study on highly skilled French migrants in London, these journeys do not operate in isolation but are mutually reinforcing and often appear together within the same narrative or event. To capture this dynamic process, drawing on Ryan's (2019) differentiated embedding framework, which conceptualizes embedding as a multidimensional and dynamic process encompassing relational, structural, spatial, and temporal dimensions, this part interprets the embedding of Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees in Sino-Polish workplace through these four interrelated dynamic processes.

As reviewed in the literature, relational embedding highlights the quality and depth of interpersonal ties, including friendship, trust, and emotional support. Spatial embedding captures migrants' participation in both formal and informal social spaces, such as workplaces, communities, and public gatherings. And temporal embedding reflects how the sense of belonging and connectedness evolves over time, shaped by career trajectories, life events, and accumulated experiences.

Building on this dynamic conceptualization and the interview findings, this study identifies a series of themes corresponding to the three dynamics of differentiated embedding: entry motivations and pathways into Sino-Polish workplaces (spatial embedding), first encounters and initial impressions (relational embedding), formal and informal workplace networks (spatial embedding), from language barriers to behavioral adjustment (temporal embedding), and finally, the development of cross-cultural friendship (relational embedding).

From the initial motivations for Sino-Polish workplace entry, through processes of mutual adjustment and communication within daily collaboration, to the eventual formation of intercultural friendships, this process together illustrates the dynamically differentiated embedding unfold within Sino-Polish workplaces.

Theme: Entry Motivations and Pathways into Sino-Polish Workplaces

Ryan (2017) observes that many cross-cultural experiences often begin with serendipity, such as a short-term vacation that eventually develops into a long-term professional opportunity. In a similar way, both Chinese and Polish respondents frequently reported that their entry into cross-cultural workplaces was triggered by a specific opportunity. Based on the interview data in this study, the motivations for entering Sino-Polish workplaces can be categorized into three types: bicultural affinity driven, cross-cultural experience driven, and serendipitous entry.

The first, bicultural affinity driven, refers to respondents who had cultivated a sustained curiosity, sense of affinity, and value alignment with both Chinese and Polish cultures, often through earlier academic or professional experiences. This orientation led them to intentionally pursue opportunities in Sino-Polish workplaces with clear motivations. By anticipating potential challenges, they established a positive psychological foundation for subsequent adaptation and integration. Respondents described their experiences in the following ways:

- ◆ *I stayed in Poland to work after completing my master's degree, and it has been a year and a half now.” (CH-4)*
- ◆ *“I studied in China, and one day a woman approached me on the street and offered me a job as an English teacher... I realized how much I enjoyed working with Chinese colleagues, so I joined a Chinese company.” (PL-1)*

Therefore, respondents who share a bicultural background often experience less discomfort arising from cultural differences in the early stages of their careers. In this context, they are more inclined to develop positive cross-cultural interactions and exchanges with their colleagues. As noted by our Chinese and Polish respondents:

- ◆ *“I participated in a university program, adapted to the Polish environment...I know Polish people and their lifestyle.” (CH-6, CH-7)*
- ◆ *“I previously had Chinese students and coworkers ...Now I am in a new environment, but I know how to communicate...” (PL-6)*

Second, cross-cultural experience driven entry refers to employees with previous work or life experiences in cultures other than China and Poland. Having already recognized the

diversity and differences across cultures, these respondents developed an open attitude toward self-adjustment and adaptation in cross-cultural workplaces. As a result, they showed greater openness and adaptability when joining Sino-Polish workplaces. They could observe the behaviors of colleagues from different cultural backgrounds more quickly and adjust their actions flexibly to align with diverse cultural norms. As shown in examples:

- ◆ *“I studied Russian for a year in China and then spent a year in Russia...I later moved to Poland, where I have now lived for five years, and I am very satisfied with my decision.” (CH-1)*
- ◆ *“I am Polish but was born in Lithuania and later moved to Spain. Growing up in a multicultural environment prepared me well...I came to Poland for an interview and only then discovered that the company was Chinese.” (PL-7)*

Finally, serendipitous entry refers to employees who entered Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces primarily due to timing and circumstance, often shaped by job-seeking opportunities or life events:

- ◆ *“I came to Poland simply to look for a job. The Belt and Road Initiative presented a good opportunity.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *At first, I didn't really plan for it. I just received a job offer with interesting projects. The fact that it was a Chinese company was a bonus.” (PL-4)*

The three entry pathways reflect different starting points of cross-cultural embedding. Respondents categorized as bicultural affinity driven or cross-cultural experience driven often found it easier to establish initial trust and interaction networks, as they already possessed prior exposure to diverse cultural contexts. In contrast, embedding quality for those with serendipitous entry depended more heavily on subsequent interpersonal interactions and work experiences. This distinction highlights the crucial role of entry pathways in shaping the development of cross-cultural relationships.

Theme: First Encounters and Initial Impressions

The initial encounters between colleagues, whether formal or informal, serve as a crucial starting point for workplace embedding. This temporal process directly shapes the relational process, influencing the atmosphere of trust and cooperation at the early stages. First impressions have been shown to exert a salient and often unexpectedly enduring influence on employees' attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions (Swider et al., 2022). As respondents in this study highlighted, the feelings arising from first encounters frequently became the starting point for the development of positive workplace relationships, substantially affecting the pace of adaptation and the patterns of interaction.

From the perspective of Chinese self-initiated expatriates, most respondents generally reported positive first impressions of their Polish colleagues. They described them as diligent, serious, yet friendly. Although somewhat restrained in emotional expression, Polish colleagues were widely perceived by Chinese employees as reliable partners for cooperation:

- ◆ *“At the first meeting, they seemed very serious and rarely smiled, but they were very kind. You need to take the initiative in communication to talk to them, then gradually they get better.” (CH-2, CH-4)*
- ◆ *“Polish people are more hard-working than Western Europeans, our Chinese love this. They may not look so warmhearted or talkative, but they are highly efficient. I really like working with them and prefer this style.” (CH-3)*
- ◆ *“They are very serious and have a bit of dark humor. I had learned about this before, as our company provided related training. But if you talk to them, they will try their best to help.” (CH-7)*

The impressions described above indicate that Chinese self-initiated expatriates regard Polish colleagues highly for their professional attitudes and competencies. The interviews further suggest that proactively engaging in interaction and communication, grounded in understanding Polish culture and national character, is a practical pathway for fostering mutual trust and smooth collaboration.

From the perspective of most Polish respondents, they emphasized the warmth and friendliness of their Chinese colleagues, while also appreciating their diligence in the workplace:

- ◆ *“I was really surprised because I did not expect such a warm welcome. The initial contact was very positive. Chinese colleagues are hardworking.” (PL-3)*
- ◆ *“I was nervous because I was unsure about my language skills, but they were very kind and invited me to join them for coffee and tea.” (PL-4)*

For Polish employees with limited exposure to Chinese culture, such warmth was often perceived as a sincere and reassuring signal that facilitated the rapid establishment of initial trust among colleagues. However, some Polish employees with prior cultural experience in China or deeper engagement with Chinese communities adopted a more cautious and discerning attitude toward this perceived “warmth”:

- ◆ *“I find Chinese people are warmhearted and always willing to help, but you must distinguish between genuine and superficial friendliness. I know that sometimes such warmth is simply a form of politeness, so I must be careful in interpreting it.” (PL-1)*
- ◆ *“I would say that Polish people are open to working with other nationalities, but with Chinese colleagues, you need to be cautious—sometimes they just pretend to like you.” (PL-2)*

These opinions suggest that emotional expressions by Chinese employees in the workplace may carry different meanings and levels of depth, which Polish colleagues need to interpret through sustained interaction and gradual adaptation. Overall, initial encounters play a foundational role in cross-cultural embedding. The generally positive impressions held by Chinese and Polish employees help create a cooperative atmosphere. Nevertheless, the nuanced interpretations offered by more culturally experienced individuals highlight that the establishment of cross-cultural trust is a process that requires time, continuity, and the validation of ongoing interactions.

Theme: Formal and Informal Workplace Networks

Embedding progressively deepens through both formal and informal networks. As Kuipers (2009) points out, the degree of overlap between formal and informal workplace networks is closely related to employees' sense of belonging within an organization. These interaction networks provide employees with key platforms for adapting to cultural differences and building meaningful relationships.

The interviews reveal that Chinese and Polish employees gradually developed their own formal communication routines through sustained collaboration. These exchanges were frequent and efficient, and Chinese employees generally adhered to Polish norms in formal contexts, demonstrating cultural respect and contributing to harmonious relationships:

- ◆ *“After working with them for a while, we developed some unique ways of communicating at work, which feels very warm. We interact frequently, and everything is quite efficient.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *“In formal workplace interactions, Chinese colleagues respect Polish standards and culture. Overall, I have been able to get along well.” (PL-6)*

However, behind this mutual recognition, differences in cultural backgrounds also shaped variations in the behaviors of Chinese and Polish employees, particularly in terms of communication styles and different work habits. One key observation raised by Polish employees was that their Chinese colleagues, when facing mistakes at work, tended to focus on quickly correcting the error and safeguarding their personal reputation, rather than offering a direct apology:

- ◆ *“Chinese colleagues place great importance on personal reputation; when mistakes happen, they sometimes become quite anxious.” (PL-1, PL-2)*
- ◆ *“Our internal culture when working with Chinese colleagues is not about identifying who is right or wrong. We try to find alternative ways of doing things, and we have developed this cooperative style over time.” (PL-3)*
- ◆ *“They never directly say something is not good. When discussing tasks, if we fail, we simply need to fix it as quickly as possible.” (PL-4)*

On the other hand, Chinese employees perceived Polish coworkers' communication style as having specific characteristics of a high-context culture, particularly in everyday collegial interactions, though to a lesser extent than in Chinese culture. Once task instructions were involved, Polish colleagues communicated directly and explicitly, ensuring clarity and task completion:

- ◆ *“In daily interactions, Polish colleagues also sometimes speak indirectly about their feeling, though not in a complicated way. When it comes to work, if you don't understand something, just ask—they are happy to help, and together we can complete tasks quickly.” (CH-4)*
- ◆ *“They have a task-oriented personality. Their communication is polite and gentle, but their expectations are clear—they hope we can finish the work quickly.” (CH-6)*

In formal interaction settings, the initial differences did not evolve into barriers but instead triggered a process of mutual adjustment in communication. Chinese employees became more inclined to express themselves directly on key issues, while Polish employees emphasized tone and politeness. They also showed sensitivity to the importance of reputation for their Chinese colleagues, striving to avoid offending. As reflected in our respondents' accounts, both sides' communication styles gradually adapted and stabilized into interaction norms suited to the Sino-Polish workplace:

- ◆ *“At the beginning, I was unsure whether it was appropriate to speak so directly about some tasks, I realized that being direct is the best way to communicate with Polish colleagues, and it is also what they prefer.” (CH-3)*
- ◆ *“When I clearly tell my colleagues my expectations, they perform better. However, it is still important to be kind in tone and attitude—emotional support matters.” (CH-7)*
- ◆ *“I know from experience that they prefer to stay quiet and try to avoid certain conflicts. After so many years of working together, we can now communicate directly about any issue, although we still need to consider our words and their reputations.” (PL-4)*
- ◆ *“In Poland, if you have a problem at work, you must say it directly, but not in a harsh way. Personally, I sometimes worry that my way of expressing myself may offend them, but they*

also adjust, since we are in Poland and both sides need to adapt their attitudes and behaviors.” (PL-7)

In workplace embedding, formal interactions often establish the foundation and norms for cooperation, while informal exchanges operate beyond these rules, infusing relationships with warmth and emotional support. In other words, the former shapes the framework and sense of efficiency in collaboration, whereas the latter deepens mutual attachment and belonging through everyday practices. Celebrations, shared meals, gift exchanges, and casual conversations provide important ground for building cross-cultural trust and emotional attachment. Polish employees often interpreted the sharing of food and festive gifts by their Chinese colleagues as an “emotional language” of friendliness:

- ◆ *“We go to Chinese restaurants together. Chinese colleagues know all the best places. During Chinese or Polish festivals, we eat, chat, and share about games, sports, and politics. It is enjoyable.” (PL-6)*

For Chinese employees, the initial restraint and introversion of their Polish colleagues gradually evolved, through long-term interaction, into more intimate exchanges that included sharing aspects of family life and offering personalized care:

- ◆ *“Polish colleagues sometimes talk about their families and even give us small gifts. It feels very thoughtful.” (CH-4)*

In these informal settings, emotions, humor, and emotional support could be expressed more openly, creating a relaxed and trustworthy space for interaction:

- ◆ *“We simply share our life. As I got to know them better, it became easier and more enjoyable, and we even go out for drinks together. It’s quite relaxed—they never break into your privacy.” (CH-5)*
- ◆ *We share our experiences and knowledge, and things like that. We have also gone on a few trips and had after work gatherings. Our relationships are very good.” (PL-4)*

These informal interactions outside the workplace, accumulated over time (temporal), bridge cultural and spatial distance (spatial), and strengthen interpersonal bonds (relational), gradually giving a sense of stable workplace belonging. Overall, the interplay between formal and

informal exchanges among Chinese and Polish employees demonstrates that embedding in cross-cultural workplaces is a multidimensional and gradual process. It is constructed incrementally through work related communication within organizational structures, while at the same time being reshaped and deepened through ongoing emotional interactions in everyday life.

Theme: From Language Barriers to Behavioral Adjustment

Although interactions between Chinese and Polish colleagues were generally positive, specific barriers and obstacles were inevitably present in cross-cultural workplaces. The integration process often involved ongoing communication challenges and differences in work styles, testing individuals' adaptability and patience. In this study, from the perspectives of both sides, language barriers emerged as the most immediate and salient issue, significantly affecting workplace communication and integration.

Employees with different native languages often struggled to fully convey or understand intentions in formal and informal settings due to varying levels of English proficiency. Several Chinese and Polish respondents pointed out that language barriers were a significant source of stress in the early stages of collaboration, particularly when professional terminology or client communication was involved:

- ◆ *“When I first arrived, my English was not good... However, language remains the most significant barrier.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *“It was difficult to cooperate mostly because of communication issues... misunderstanding due to poor language skills was the main problem.” (PL-6)*

Over time, basic communication between the two sides improved. However, in the context of complex tasks, language differences still tended to cause information gaps and experiences of being “excluded.” This phenomenon reflects a “majority language effect,” whereby the dominant language in an interaction shifts spontaneously to that of the majority group. Polish respondents noted that they were often excluded from key information flows during meetings

or informal discussions conducted mainly in Chinese. Similarly, Chinese respondents reported comparable experiences when working in teams where Polish was the dominant language:

- ◆ *“When Polish colleagues gather together, they start speaking their own language... we Chinese look each other...creates language barriers between us.” (CH-4)*
- ◆ *“When most of the group is Chinese, communication shifts entirely to Chinese, leaving Polish colleagues isolated. Sometimes we need to use google translate to understand...even during a meeting with a few polish colleagues, work language still Chinese...” (PL-7)*

Beyond the barriers created by language differences, the two groups also displayed distinct cultural and individual characteristics in their work habits. To capture this, the interview analysis adopts a “two-way mirroring” perspective, in which Chinese and Polish employees commented on each other’s practices and reflected on their behaviors and preferences.

From the perspective of Chinese employees, in the dimension of self-presentation, respondents generally described themselves as dedicated and flexible, emphasizing collective responsibility and emotional labor. They tended to regard overtime work, adaptive responses, and being “always available” for communication as necessary for maintaining team performance and organizational functioning. As illustrated below:

- ◆ *“We work long hours as much as we can. we think when the company does well, everyone benefits. We Chinese are not very strong in planning, but we are more flexible and open to change.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *“We work at a fast pace and can respond to emergencies at any time. Polish colleagues leave at five, but Chinese colleagues are still in the office.” (CH-4)*

In evaluating others, Chinese employees generally described their Polish colleagues as highly organized, rule-oriented, and having a clear sense of boundaries with a strong emphasis on work–life separation. At the same time, they were perceived as relatively less flexible, often showing resistance or discomfort when tasks or rules were subject to change:

- ◆ *“They strictly adhere to the eight-hour workday. Polish colleagues are all very organized—everything is scheduled with clear boundaries, and they try not to disturb anyone’s private time, but they’re not flexible like us.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *“Everything requires an appointment... their schedules are very clear. You cannot change the work plan easily because everything should settle down and finish according to plan.” (CH-6)*

From the perspective of Polish employees, respondents generally described themselves as efficient, professional, direct, and boundary conscious in the dimension of self-presentation. They emphasized completing tasks within the eight-hour workday and sought to avoid overtime that might invade personal time. This self-perception was largely consistent with the positive impressions expressed by their Chinese colleagues:

- ◆ *“Our Polish team mainly tries to start work as early as possible, and the main goal is to finish as quickly as we can. We work efficiently and with focus, so that we can enjoy our personal lives afterwards.” (PL-3)*
- ◆ *“... and if I clock out, I don’t work anymore. There is no room for delays. We use email—that’s important—and we have our private time. That’s different.” (PL-7)*

In evaluating others, Polish employees generally perceived their Chinese colleagues as diligent and flexible yet expressed reservations about the relationship between overtime culture and efficiency. On the one hand, they acknowledged the high level of commitment shown by Chinese employees; on the other hand, they questioned whether long working hours necessarily translated into higher productivity. They also pointed out differences in pace and communication styles, particularly those shaped by tools such as WeChat:

- ◆ *They are definitely hardworking. They can really sacrifice everything for the company... They can stay very, very long. For them, the longer they work, the better—but sometimes I wonder whether working such long hours is still efficient.” (PL-2)*
- ◆ *“Chinese colleagues usually arrive at the office around 9 a.m. and then take long breaks during the day—sometimes two hours. Close to 5 p.m., they start working again... And,*

you know, they are always on their phones, even midnight. So now we use WeChat as well.”
(PL-3, PL-7)

The language and work style differences reveal the core challenges of embedding within cross-cultural teams. These differences extend beyond the level of information exchange and permeate task pace, boundary perceptions, and collaboration logic. Although long-term interaction fosters a dynamic understanding of one another, structural divergences remain in balancing overtime culture, definitions of efficiency, and the use of working languages.

Theme: Development of Cross-cultural Friendship

In cross-cultural workplaces, relational embedding not only influences the smoothness of collaboration but also affects whether employees can gain a sense of belonging, achievement, and security (Ryan, 2022). However, as Ryan and Mulholland (2014a, 2014b) point out, broad and diverse workplace relationship networks do not necessarily equate to deep personal friendships. For most Chinese respondents in this study, Polish colleagues were often perceived as potential commercial or professional resources to be mobilized in the future, rather than purely personal friends. As illustrated below:

- ◆ *“I think I will keep in touch with them in the future, especially with those Polish colleagues I have a better relationship with. Having one more friend is always good, but most of our communication will probably still be work-related.”* (CH-2)
- ◆ *There is still a chance of becoming friends in the future—after all, one more connection means one more opportunity. If they can recommend some good resources, that would be truly valuable.”* (CH-7)

At the same time, some Chinese employees acknowledged that even after working in the local workplace for an extended period, developing genuinely close personal relationships with Polish colleagues was not easy. The obstacles were often attributed to the social circles' closed nature or cultural differences:

- ◆ *“I'd like to be friends with them, but they have their own friend circles, and it's quite hard to fit in. For now, they are more like networking resources to me.”* (CH-1)

The responses of Polish employees revealed a similar tendency. While they also acknowledged the value of maintaining long-term connections with their Chinese colleagues, they were more inclined to view such relationships as important professional ties to Chinese and broader Asian business networks:

- ◆ *“I think I have very good contacts among Chinese colleagues—they are very smart, so they will always be valuable to me.” (PL-5)*
- ◆ *“Yes, in my opinion, they could be a very valuable resource for enterprises operating in Europe with Chinese partners.” (PL-6)*

However, when it came to personal friendships, Polish employees also acknowledged that such relationships required more time and mutual understanding:

- ◆ *“We are kind of like friends—friendly relations—but mostly colleagues at work... we need more time.” (PL-4)*

In sum, while Chinese and Polish employees can establish stable and mutually beneficial collegial relationships in the workplace, such ties are often characterized as “weak connections” or resource-oriented exchanges, with deep personal friendships involving high levels of emotional investment remaining relatively rare. This result reflects differences in social orientations, cultural expectations, and the multilayered and complex nature of relational embedding in cross-cultural workplaces.

Viewed holistically, analyzing the dynamic processes of differentiated embedding between Chinese and Polish employees directly addresses RQ4. By tracing employees’ entry motivations, first impressions upon initial encounters, and daily interaction patterns, and presenting both sides through a mirroring perspective, this section provides a detailed account of how Chinese and Polish employees communicate and embed themselves in the workplace. The interview findings reveal a process that intertwines emotional experiences with positional responses and illustrates a gradual shift from minor frictions toward mutual acceptance.

The respondents’ narratives uncover a progressive and ongoing adaptation path in cross-cultural workplaces. Through collaboration and feedback, both sides continually learning each other’s modes of expression, observe one another’s behaviors, and gradually develop new

patterns of mutual understanding. This two-way adjustment is evident in specific behavioral strategies and shifts in communication styles, expression habits, and interaction rhythms.

Overall, differentiated embedding emerges here as a dynamic, relationship-driven process that mitigates initial cultural frictions and lays a solid foundation for further deepening relationships and developing high-quality interactions.

4.2 Category: Guanxi as a Relational Strategy

This theme examines how the traditional Chinese concepts of Renqing (reciprocity), Ganqing (affective ties), and Xinren (deep trust), together with Mianzi (reputation), which emerged inductively as an in vivo code from interviews. All shaped the development and maintenance of workplace relationships. In Sino-Polish workplaces, Guanxi operates as a multifaceted relational practice that structures how individuals connect, collaborate, and navigate everyday interactions. This section unpacks each dimension and shows how these interrelated elements co-construct the workplace's relational landscape.

Theme: Renqing

In the Chinese cultural context, Renqing is a deeply embedded norm of reciprocity in social interactions, emphasizing a sense of responsibility and obligation for colleagues to support and assist one another (Yen et al., 2011). It is not confined to emotional expression but is manifested through concrete actions, such as offering help, providing resources, or even going to great lengths to assist others in achieving their goals.

From Chinese employees' perspective in this study, such reciprocal practices of Renqing often began with small, everyday matters:

- ◆ *“Sometimes my colleagues ask me to bring things from China, and I always try to help, because when I was in Poland, my Polish colleagues supported me a lot. So, if they want something, I’ll do my best to return the favor.” (CH-2)*

Interestingly, Chinese employees emphasized that the core of Renqing lies in a psychological contract of “delayed reciprocity”. Assistance offered to one another does not require immediate

repayment. Later, there is always an implicit expectation of future return within the relationship network:

- ◆ *“Basically, if a colleague I’m close with doesn’t make an unreasonable request, I’ll help if I can. After all, I hope that in the future... maybe a Polish colleague can also do something for me.” (CH-3)*
- ◆ *“Whether at work or in daily life, I help my Polish colleagues whenever I can. This is Chinese culture because I might need their help one day. I’m just worried that they might not understand this kind of friendship.” (CH-5)*

As several respondents explained, their views resonate with Amble’s (1995) observation that Renqing functions like an insurance within interpersonal networks: it may not be immediately used, but its existence provides psychological reassurance and a sense of security. With the deepening of cross-cultural interactions, this reciprocal awareness, implanted with warmth, was also perceived by Polish employees. Many first experienced such care from their Chinese colleagues during festive gatherings, gift exchanges, and similar occasions:

- ◆ *“Sometimes they brought Chinese vodka for me or helped my kids learn Chinese, and they never asked for anything in return. It felt warm and genuine.” (PL-3)*
- ◆ *“We had a barbecue for Spring Festival, and it was nice—the whole company was invited. They cooked a lot for us and even gave us New Year decorations.” (PL-5)*

Renqing also permeated workplace contexts. For example, one Polish employee recalled instances from Chinese colleague support when handling mistake:

- ◆ *“My Chinese colleague helped me a lot. Sometimes when I made small mistakes, they would quietly cover for me. I really appreciate that.” (PL-7)*

However, as acts of Renqing gradually became more visible to Polish colleagues, they also began to perceive the implicit expectations and pressures that often accompanied these behaviors from Chinese employees:

- ◆ *“Chinese colleagues help you a lot and are always very kind, but sometimes when they suddenly ask you for something, it’s hard to say no.” (PL-5, PL-7)*

- ◆ *“They gave me some beautiful gifts, saying they were thanking me, but I know they had some expectations, maybe looking forward to your help...but awful thing is I don’t know when and where they need such help.” (PL-6)*

Renqing functions as an embedded practice of reciprocity in Sino-Polish workplaces. It is an important relational pattern expected by Chinese employees and a driving force for fostering warm and supportive coworker relationships. At the same time, this norm of reciprocity, which bears a distinct imprint of Chinese cultural traditions, may also pose challenges for Polish employees in the adaptation process. They are required to embrace the warmth embedded in such relationships and find ways of balancing goodwill with maintaining personal boundaries.

Theme: Ganqing

In the Chinese cultural context, Ganqing is the decisive factor in determining whether relationships can be sustained over the long term, and it represents the emotional core of Guanxi (Chen and Bedford, 2022). Its mechanism lies in the gradual accumulation of emotional capital through long-term interaction, where continuous care and reciprocity transform collegial ties from coworkers into friends, thereby fostering deeper emotional bonds. Only when this bond has been tested and strengthened through time and shared experiences can Guanxi achieve greater resilience and a more solid foundation of trust.

In Sino-Polish workplace settings, the development of Ganqing often unfolds as a slow and detailed process. For many Chinese employees, relationships are only considered to embody genuine Ganqing after colleagues have jointly faced challenges and supported one another in critical moments. Such emotional investment is reflected in close collaboration at work and sincere care extended into everyday life:

- ◆ *“At work, we support each other; when urgent matters come up, colleagues are understanding and willing to help. For example, if someone needs to take a sudden leave due to illness or family reasons, others will check and show concern when they return.” (CH-1)*

- ◆ *“Sometimes we ask about each other’s families, have meals together, and chat about life. Over time, these interactions make us feel much closer.” (CH-3, CH-4)*

Some Chinese respondents noted that the displays of care infused with Ganqing by their Polish colleagues played an important role in alleviating workplace stress and providing psychological support:

- ◆ *“Before company presentations, some polish colleagues I am close with will chat with me to help relieve my anxiety. I really appreciate this.” (CH-6)*

Such support, grounded in Ganqing, gradually became an important bond in the daily interactions between Chinese and Polish employees. This emotional support, often expressed in subtle moments, significantly reduced the sense of distance between colleagues and served as a key source of attachment and belonging. Despite differences in cultural backgrounds and modes of expression, Polish employees likewise came to recognize and appreciate the power of this deeper form of emotional care:

- ◆ *“When I had some issues at home, my colleagues told me to go home and take care of it immediately. That kind of unconditional support really made me happy.” (PL-1)*
- ◆ *“You can feel when your Chinese colleagues genuinely care about you , not just as coworkers, but as friends. That makes the whole atmosphere much warmer.” (PL-5)*

Ganqing is not only the emotional core of Guanxi but also a key mechanism that enables workplace relationships in cross-cultural settings to evolve from task based collaboration to mutual dependence. While the expressions of Ganqing differ between Chinese and Polish employees due to their distinct cultural backgrounds, its development relies on daily emotional investment and subtle gestures of care. Over time, these practices gradually cultivate an emotional network through what can be described as “gentle and imperceptible cultivation”, transforming interactions from mere cooperation into positive patterns characterized by trust, care, and shared growth.

Theme: Xinren

In the cultural context of Guanxi, Xinren cannot be equated with the concept of trust. It encompasses not only the mutual reliance, confidence, and dependability developed among team members but also the degree to which written or verbal commitments are fulfilled (Yen et al., 2011).

In Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces, the interviews reveal that Xinren is accumulated progressively through continuous interaction, showing both a staged and context dependent character. At the beginning of workplace collaboration, both sides tended to develop surface-level Xinren based on roles and institutional frameworks. With the cultivation of Renqing and Ganqing, this surface-level Xinren gradually evolved into functional Xinren, which is grounded in perceptions of competence, reliability, and deliverability. In sensitive matters or private domains, however, Xinren was often expressed as conditional Xinren. This process of transformation was evident in the accounts of both Chinese and Polish respondents.

In the initial stages of relationship building, both Chinese and Polish employees commonly demonstrated surface-level Xinren, which was established through polite interactions and adherence to rules, with communication limited primarily to work related matters:

- ◆ *“From the beginning, our communication is mostly limited to work-related matters. The trust mainly stays within the scope of work.” (CH-2, CH-4)*
- ◆ *“...We normally share business and scientific information, not private information.” (PL-2, PL-6)*

As communication and collaboration between the two sides matured over time, Xinren gradually shifted toward a more solid form of functional Xinren. At this stage, both sides paid greater attention to each other's sense of responsibility, ability to deliver on commitments, and attitudes toward communication when facing problems, whether in formal or informal interactions:

- ◆ *“In daily work with Polish colleagues, I pay attention to whether they are reliable and proactive in completing tasks. Only through cooperation can we share information.” (CH-4)*

- ◆ *“I think we all agree the importance of verbal agreements, especially for Polish people, if you make a promise, you have to do it.” (CH-7)*
- ◆ *“Now, after six years, I feel there is a lot of trust regarding to work, they are responsible people.” (PL-5)*
- ◆ *“...We will try our best to complete everything we promised each other, no matter how difficult the task is, we have a deal...” (PL-7)*

However, functional Xinren often remained confined to the work domain. Once issues of personal life or sensitive matters were involved, Xinren took the form of conditional Xinren, characterized by clear boundaries and contingencies, and required more time and repeated verification to be established:

- ◆ *“Although we trust each other at work, when it comes to private matters, it takes more time to understand and observe. Trust cannot be built overnight.” (CH-2, CH-6, CH-7)*
- ◆ *“It is hard to get some information, because everything is top secret. To get confidential information is very hard, as they do not really trust foreigners.” (PL-2)*
- ◆ *“Whether someone is Chinese or not, you never say everything out loud. There are always some things you must keep to yourself.” (PL-3)*

Overall, Xinren in Sino-Polish workplaces emerges as a dynamic and staged process. Surface-level Xinren provides the minimum sense of security necessary for cooperation. Functional Xinren, established through confirmation of competence and reliability, consolidates task collaboration and predictability, and can be regarded as an external manifestation of the performance outcomes generated by positive collegial relationships. Whether Xinren can remain conditional Xinren and or develop into a deeper, relational form of trust depends on the accumulation of long-term interaction, reciprocal information exchange, and sustained positive feedback.

Theme: Mianzi

Mianzi, as a concept closely intertwined with Guanxi, can be understood as an individual’s face, workplace reputation, and outward image. The interviews conducted in Sino-Polish

workplaces revealed that both Chinese and Polish employees frequently referred to personal reputation. For instance, Polish respondents observed that Chinese employees sometimes avoided offering public apologies or responded with silence when faced with criticism, actions that were interpreted as strategies for preserving Mianzi. Although Guanxi theory has not systematically addressed Mianzi, its frequent appearance in the interview narratives suggests that it constitutes an important implicit rule shaping workplace relationships. The further findings of this study indicate that Mianzi is not only a culturally distinctive notion within Chinese society but is also reinterpreted and practiced in the context of Sino-Polish workplace interactions.

According to Zhou and Zhang (2024), face consciousness in the workplace can be categorized into proactive Mianzi orientation and defensive Mianzi orientation. In many situations, both Chinese and Polish employees demonstrated elements of proactive Mianzi orientation by taking positive actions to project a favorable image. For example, Chinese employees tended to work overtime, take on tasks proactively, and praise colleagues in public settings to maintain and enhance their reputation. While Polish employees were relatively unfamiliar with the concept of Mianzi, they similarly upheld a positive professional image by completing tasks efficiently within working hours, demonstrating competence in front of supervisors, and rarely refusing work assignments. At the same time, defensive Mianzi orientation was more often reflected in strategies such as avoiding public criticism or the exposure of mistakes, as well as preferring private communication and discreet problem-solving.

Regarding the expression of proactive Mianzi orientation in the workplace, our Chinese respondents explained it in the following way:

- ◆ *“We just bury ourselves in work, work long time showing our diligence and rarely saying no. For Mianzi.” (CH-4, CH-6)*
- ◆ *“We complement each other in front of supervisors, also include polish colleagues.so everyone saves face and the atmosphere stays positive.” (CH-5)*

Although there is no directly equivalent term for Mianzi in Polish culture, the interview narratives revealed that the behaviors of Polish employees reflected a proactive Mianzi orientation. They constructed a positive professional image and reputation for competence by demonstrating visible performance outcomes and proactively taking on tasks:

- ◆ *“We often try to take on more tasks or finish early to maintain a positive image in front of colleagues and managers.” (PL-5)*
- ◆ *“There is a similar culture in Poland, where people rarely refuse tasks and requests from their superiors, as perhaps refuse means that you are not capable enough.” (PL-6)*

However, Mianzi in Sino-Polish workplaces did not always function positively. When facing mistakes or negative feedback, some Chinese employees displayed a defensive Mianzi orientation. They were highly sensitive to being publicly singled out for problems and preferred to protect their personal reputation through private communication and correction:

- ◆ *“At first, I am especially afraid of being point out for mistakes with Polish. Saving face is important. When mistakes happen, I don’t know how to apology but just fix it quickly.” (CH-3)*
- ◆ *“If there’s a problem, don’t say it directly in front of everyone, just give a hint at it.” (CH-7)*

At the same time, the defensive Mianzi orientation also created certain obstacles in communication for Polish colleagues. Polish respondents admitted that the heightened concern of their Chinese coworkers for Mianzi, in some situations, weakened direct problem-solving and reduced the efficiency of communication:

- ◆ *“I noticed that Chinese colleagues get quite uncomfortable with public feedback. They prefer private conversations to avoid embarrassment. They even don’t ask or have questions.” (PL-5)*
- ◆ *“I rarely hear feedback like ‘this person said sorry’ or ‘admitted a mistake’—things tend to happen behind the scenes.” (PL-7)*

Mianzi in Sino-Polish workplaces demonstrates a dual dynamic of penetration. On the one hand, both sides employ proactive Mianzi orientation to build positive images and foster a

constructive team atmosphere. On the other hand, when conflicts or mistakes arise, different forms of defensive Mianzi orientation influence the directness and efficiency of communication. It is worth noting that although the concept of Mianzi originates in Chinese culture, Polish workplaces also display implicit logics of concern for personal image and social evaluation. Such two-way practices of Mianzi in a Sino-Polish context not only add complexity to team interactions but also provide a comparative perspective for the study of Mianzi culture.

Overall, this thematic analysis focuses on how Chinese self-initiated expatriates employ Guanxi as a culturally embedded social skill to navigate workplace dynamics and gradually build closer relationships with their Polish coworkers. The findings reveal that although Mianzi is rooted in Chinese culture, it has gradually been recognized, understood, and integrated into everyday workplace interactions in Sino-Polish settings. Specifically, Renqing operates as a reciprocal mechanism that sustains everyday mutual assistance and basic trust, stabilizing expectations of cooperation and diluting workplace conflicts through a cycle of helping, reciprocating, and positive evaluation. Ganqing contributes to relationship building by fostering mutual reliance through accumulated emotional investment and subtle care, thereby enhancing employees' sense of belonging and attachment within the team. Xinren, expressed as a staged and context-dependent form of trust, sheds light on the levels of confidence and adaptation among employees. Taken together, the interview analysis in this section demonstrates that Guanxi practices are transferable and hold practical value in Sino-Polish environments.

4.3 Category: Building High-Quality Connections through Interaction

As the discussion of embedding and Guanxi in the previous sections has shown, both Chinese and Polish employees experienced genuine warmth and support in their daily workplace interactions. At the same time, cultural differences and communication barriers inevitably led to misunderstandings and frictions. Through processes of mutual adjustment, both sides gradually developed a sense of belonging and attachment, and under the moderating role of Guanxi, they were able to establish increasingly positive relationships.

The interview results of this study further indicate that high-quality connections in actual workplace settings are expressed in diverse and dynamic ways. On the one hand, everyday practices such as sharing food, offering collaboration, and providing emotional support established a positive affective tone. On the other hand, high-quality connections in the truest sense were reflected in whether colleagues could openly express genuine emotions, share burdens, and maintain respect and trust even after conflict or disagreement.

To further interpret how high-quality connections are formed and sustained, this section draws on two fundamental characteristics: relationship capabilities and subjective experiences Dutton and Heaphy (2003). The analysis follows the understanding of positive relationships proposed by Allen and Turner de Tormes (2012), Glińska-Neweś (2013, pp. 132–134), and Lis, Glińska-Neweś, and Kalińska (2015, p.32-33). High-quality connections can be described through the following components:

“Emotional carrying capacity refers to the extent to which a relationship can embrace and withstand a wide range of both positive and negative emotions. Positive relationships are able to sustain themselves in the face of emotional multiplicity”.

“Tensility denotes the degree to which a relationship can bend and endure strain when encountering challenges or setbacks. A higher level of tensility allows employees to express authentic emotions without fear of interpersonal consequences”.

“Interdependence manifests in the frequency, strength, and breadth of mutual influence between relationship partners. Intimacy encompasses self-disclosure and partner responsiveness, where greater intimacy is associated with sharing more emotionally charged and personal information”.

“Permanence reflects the extent to which a relationship remains stable and obligatory over time”.

Based on these definitions and the meanings emerging from the interview data, the analytical themes of this study were identified as: Emotional Carrying Capacity (relationship capabilities) Tensility (relationship capabilities) Interdependence and Intimacy (subjective experiences) and Permanence (subjective experiences).

Theme: Emotional Carrying Capacity

In Sino-Polish cross-cultural teams, a positive, sincere, and warm emotional atmosphere constitutes the foundation for the formation of high-quality connections. However, such emotional carrying capacity does not emerge automatically, it is built upon active and constructive interactions among employees in Sino-polish workplaces. As positive relationships gradually mature, members gain sufficient psychological safety within collegial ties, which enables them to express emotions more openly, especially negative ones.

It is important to note that emotional openness is not unlimited but rather strongly relationship dependent. For some Chinese and Polish coworkers, emotional expression was selective and oriented, which made them more restrained in sharing their feelings and thoughts:

- ◆ *“It’s easy to compliment Polish colleagues, but so far I haven’t been able to directly express my dissatisfaction or deep sadness.” (CH-4)*
- ◆ *“Whether a conversation becomes truly personal often depends on the personalities involved. With some colleagues, it’s natural to share deeper thoughts with others, we stick to small talk.” (PL-4)*

Most respondents noted that once workplace relationships reached a level of comfortable interaction, they deemed acceptable, Chinese and Polish coworkers would naturally begin to relax and gradually express their own feelings more openly no matter good or bad:

- ◆ *“Now I am no longer ashamed to express my frustration, because my colleagues are really kind, and we have good Guanxi. They know how to comfort people. When I feel anxious, they notice it and comfort me.” (CH-6)*
- ◆ *“With my closest Chinese colleagues, I feel comfortable expressing any emotion. In the beginning, most people tend to be cautious, but as years pass, we become much more open with one another.” (PL-1)*
- ◆ *“I cried a few times at work... my Chinese colleagues were empathetic. We have a good relationship, so I can’t say anything bad about it.” (PL-2)*

Chinese employees also have no barriers to expressing positive emotions and often use them as strategies to maintain and strengthen collegial relationships. For instance, they frequently expressed joy and gratitude in interactions, reinforcing the sense of being needed by others:

- ◆ *“I tell them I’m happy to work with them...I share my happiness to make the workplace better and to let them know they are needed and valued.” (CH-5, CH-7)*

However, Chinese respondents also articulated clear boundaries and norms for expressing negative emotions in Sino-Polish workplaces:

- ◆ *“I can express my negative feelings—of course I am careful about the environment—but I do share my emotions with them. I am part of the group. We try not to exaggerate, and they always show understanding.” (CH-2)*

These accounts suggest that interpersonal relations in Sino-Polish workplaces contain a degree of Emotional Carrying Capacity. Employees could not only accommodate and respond to positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and a sense of achievement but also to express negative emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and disappointment without undermining collaboration. Such expressions often became resources for support and cooperation among colleagues. While the degree of emotional openness was influenced by individual personality, the strength of collegial ties, and situational context, the interview data clearly demonstrate a cycle of emotional support grounded in Guanxi and embedding. Once positive relationships provided Chinese and Polish employees with a sense of psychological safety, members became more willing to share genuine feelings, supplying essential emotional support for forming and consolidating high-quality connections.

Theme: Tensility

Tensility, or the capacity to withstand relational tension, is one of the core characteristics of high-quality connections. It refers to the ability of a team to maintain stability and resilience in relationships when facing cultural differences, communication misunderstandings, and work-related pressures. Existing research has highlighted that emotional carrying capacity is a critical source of team resilience (Stephens, 2013). Building on the previous analysis, this study has

shown that Sino-Polish teams possess a certain degree of emotional carrying capacity. On this basis, the following discussion draws on respondents' experience to show how tensility was manifested and what outcomes it generated in actual collaboration.

Many respondents recalled that, in the early stages of team integration, the pace of work and the modes of task expression used by Chinese employees often differed significantly from those of their Polish colleagues, creating discomfort and confusion. The concrete manifestation of tensility lay in the renegotiation of boundaries and norms, as well as in the mutual adjustment of rhythms and working styles when conflicts, misunderstandings, or tensions arose. As several Chinese respondents noted, this often involved self-adjustment behaviors:

- ◆ *“At the beginning, we might stay late, but soon realized every Polish colleague leaves on time, and now we changed our own behavior as well; we try to catch them a bit and not stay too late.” (CH-3, CH-4, CH-7)*

These kinds of adjustments in work behavior are also seen in Polish coworkers:

- ◆ *“At the start, I had a lot of overtime almost every day, but not now. I understand that I just need to do my part and leave early; they can stay late, and both of us are happy.” (PL-4)*

Such two-way adjustments in work behavior indicate that different cultural practices did not solidify into oppositional patterns. Instead, under the support of positive coworker relationships, they were gradually absorbed and reconciled, leading to sustainable rhythms of collaboration and negotiated boundary norms.

The continuous adaptation of communication styles placed even greater demands on the tensility of high-quality relationships. Differences in communicative preferences made misunderstandings between colleagues more likely. At the outset, Chinese employees sometimes tended to use “mind flick”, a style of communication that relies on hints or implicit expressions of task requirements to reduce psychological pressure or avoid direct conflict:

- ◆ *“Certain tasks just require meeting the basic standard. Saying too much is a waste of effort, so I try to have a mind flick, but Polish colleagues find it hard to understand.” (CH-3)*

As identified at the beginning of this study, Polish employees, by contrast, were more accustomed to direct and explicit instructions:

- ◆ *“Sometimes, the information I need doesn’t reach me directly, or it goes through other departments. Often, the actual task isn’t explicitly stated, so I have to guess what is really expected.” (PL-3)*

The tensility of the relationship also accommodated this sense of discomfort, allowing both sides to gradually adjust to one another. Polish employees learned to “read the air,” that is, to infer implicit instructions and emotions from context, while Chinese employees became more inclined toward directness and clarity in their collaboration:

- ◆ *“You have to read between the lines and interpret the task behind the words. Polish can do it as well, but with Chinese colleagues we need to think more.” (PL-1, PL-7)*
- ◆ *“We gradually learned to communicate with Polish colleagues in a more direct and clear way, reducing the ambiguity.” (CH-4, CH-5, CH-6)*

More importantly, the tensility of positive relationships allowed both sides to tolerate discomfort, which encouraged team learning and self-adjustment. As one Polish respondent noted, while adapting to the Chinese pace of work, they also brought their own straightforwardness and time management practices back into the team:

- ◆ *“I teach them to take breaks and finish work on time, and everything still gets done on WeChat.” (PL-5)*

As respondents showed, the essence of tensility is not to eliminate all disagreements and frictions but to preserve space for continuous self-adjustment within existing organizational and cultural boundaries while maintaining the capacity to quickly identify, interpret, and repair errors or conflicts when they arise. To some extent, it also encouraged open communication and mutual support between Chinese and Polish employees, strengthening workplace interdependence.

Theme: Interdependence and Intimacy

In Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces, as employees' emotional carrying capacity and tensility strengthened, their sense of belonging and attachment to shared work contexts also increased. As a result, Chinese and Polish coworkers fostered stronger interdependence and intimacy. Interdependence was manifested in complementary roles, reciprocal resource exchange, and information sharing, but also in stable expectations of predictability and availability in collaborative tasks. Intimacy referred to the expression of emotions and relational responsiveness within appropriate boundaries. Emotional carrying capacity and tensility provided security and flexibility for such expressions and adjustments. Thus, interdependence became more sustainable, while intimacy was reinforced through private care, timely feedback, and empathetic support, which accelerated conflict resolution and consolidated the foundations of interdependence. In short, interdependence and intimacy were central constructs in building high-quality connections among Chinese and Polish employees.

The process by which interdependence and intimacy developed between Chinese and Polish employees followed a clear trajectory. Continuous and high-quality positive interactions in daily collaboration accumulated over time and were externalized into closeness and dependence in relationships. The resulting psychological safety and belonging gave both sides stable expectations regarding each other's predictability and availability. Chinese and Polish coworkers could rely on one another for coverage and support at critical moments of joint work. As one Chinese respondent illustrate:

- ◆ *“With cultural differences, they have become more understanding. When I explain the work, they do it well and are very willing to help. Likewise, when they need something, we help them.” (CH-3)*

Polish colleagues also had same feeling:

- ◆ *“With my colleague, after so many years, I know if I miss something, she will cover me, and I will do the same. This is the kind of trust that makes our work easier.” (PL-1)*

Also, mutual support and emotional responsiveness were direct expressions of intimacy and interdependence. Such support went beyond assistance with task completion and attention to

individual emotions and experiences. In situations of pressure or mistakes, both sides tended to show understanding and acceptance, providing comfort and practical help, which reinforced psychological safety and trust within the team:

- ◆ *“When I feel anxious, my colleagues notice it, comfort me proactively, and even help with my work. It’s truly heartwarming.” (CH-6)*
- ◆ *“There must be mutual trust within the team. Polish people are reliable... Sometimes when I say I’m too busy, they try to convince me nothing is more important than my health.” (CH-7)*
- ◆ *“If I have a problem, I know I can always talk to my Chinese colleague. Sometimes they just listen, sometimes they give advice. That makes me feel less stressed.” (PL-2)*
- ◆ *“If I need something, I know whom to call, and I can get my answer.” (PL-7)*

This emotional investment reflected the reciprocal logic of Guanxi and a mechanism through which belonging and attachment were continuously reinforced in cross-cultural contexts. A dependable network of colleague support ensured that members had someone to turn to or confide in when needed.

Finally, in some cases, the positive expressions of intimacy and interdependence extended beyond workplace boundaries, with relationships spilling over into personal life. As one Chinese respondent shared:

- ◆ *“When the work pressure is high, we go out for drinks, chat, and have heart-to-heart talks. At those times, it feels like there is no cultural difference—we are all just hardworking people trying to get by.” (CH-5)*

A Polish respondent showed positive thinking about future coworker relationship with Chinese coworkers:

- ◆ *“Even if I leave the company, I will still stay in touch with one or two Chinese colleagues. They are very understanding and are really good friends who know how to comfort me.” (PL-1)*

These experiences suggest that workplace based positive connections could evolve into supportive relationships in everyday life. However, not all team relationships quickly reached

high levels of intimacy and reliance. As illustrated in the differentiated embedding analysis, some employees preferred to maintain professional boundaries:

- ◆ *“I still rarely express non-work-related emotions; I worry that others might feel emotionally burdened by me, so the relationship stays professional.” (CH-3)*
- ◆ *“We are not showing the feelings, but after a couple of months, we can share some thoughts regarding some things.” (PL-3)*

Interdependence and intimacy in Sino-Polish workplaces were generated and sustained through a reciprocal embeddedness. Long-term positive interactions and two-way work-related and emotional support strengthened the quality of relationships. Whether and under what conditions such relationships spilled over into non-work domains remained subject to personal preferences, boundary norms, and shared experiences, and therefore warrants further exploration.

Theme: Permanence

As discussed above, interdependence and intimacy allowed relationships to spill over beyond the workplace. However, whether such spillover could extend across time and organizational boundaries and be sustained long-term depended on permanence. The permanence of high-quality connections is a key indicator of the depth and stability of Sino-polish workplace relationships. It refers to whether collegial ties continue over time, through job changes, departmental transfers, or even after leaving the organization, and whether they further evolve into friendships outside of work.

In the context of Sino-Polish teams, respondents consistently emphasized that after long periods of working together and continuous adaptation processes, some collegial relationships extended beyond organizational boundaries and endured. This has continued contact and mutual care even after role shifts, departmental changes, or resignations:

- ◆ *“I believe I’ve built some personal friendships at work. There are people you’ll remember no matter where you are.” (CH-5)*

- ◆ *“I’m genuinely willing to maintain contact with my colleagues. Some Polish coworkers have transferred, but we still keep in touch.” (CH-7)*

Polish employees expressed similar views, noting that good coworker relationships transformed into enduring personal bonds through long-term collaboration and trust:

- ◆ *“Even if we don’t work together anymore, we still check in on each other.” (PL-6)*
“I will have my friends from work for many, many years. These are not just colleagues, but friends.” (PL-4, PL-7)

This study asked interviewees to use a Personal Relationship Score (1 to 5) as an evaluative tool to capture relational stability in a more concrete way, inviting them to subjectively rate the quality of their closest Sino-Polish coworker relationship. Results showed that Chinese employees, influenced by traditional cultural norms, tended to give high but not perfect scores:

- ◆ *“Four out of five. Our relationship is quite good, but there are still clear boundaries.” (CH-1)*
- ◆ *“Five. I feel even closer to Polish colleagues; communication is enjoyable, and they’re always ready to help.” (CH-2)*
- ◆ *“Four. Not the full mark because I think our relationship can still improve in the future.” (CH-4)*
- ◆ *“Four to four point five—because no relationship is perfect, and there’s always room for further development.” (CH-7)*

Polish employees were generally more inclined to give perfect scores, openly expressing strong recognition of coworker relationships:

- ◆ *“Five. My colleague has a good sense of humor and knows how to interact so everyone feels comfortable.” (PL-1)*
- ◆ *“I think 5. Because the relationship is very good.” (PL-5, PL-6)*
- ◆ *“Six, absolutely! But that’s just me—I really like my close Chinese coworkers.” (PL-7)*

Both qualitative and quantitative findings demonstrate that permanence reflects the stability and sustainability of high-quality connections in Sino-Polish cross-cultural teams. It also reveals the dynamic interplay of Guanxi, attachment, and belonging in the evolution of positive

relationships. Under the foundation of high-quality ties, team members maintained a stable sense of belonging, recognition, and emotional support even amid organizational changes and staff turnover.

This section building on the earlier discussions of employees' adaptation processes and using Guanxi strategies further deepens our understanding of how Chinese and Polish employees construct and consolidate positive relationships through concrete workplace interactions.

The findings indicate that relationships between Chinese and Polish employees were characterized by high emotional carrying capacity, tensility, and the gradual accumulation of interdependence and intimacy through ongoing interaction. On the one hand, both sides demonstrated higher levels of trust and more mature empathetic capacities in daily exchanges, which enhanced their willingness and ability to express and accept negative emotions. On the other hand, although cultural differences and frictions remained in areas such as work pace and communication styles, long-term collaboration enabled employees to develop reciprocal patterns of adaptation and support.

It is worth noting that respondents generally expressed openness to maintaining contact and deepening relationships in the future, while offering highly positive evaluations of their colleagues during interviews. This suggests that Sino-Polish workplace relationships had evolved from functional cooperation toward relational companionship that carried emotional warmth.

The analyses across the three themes show that the dynamic process of differentiated embedding and the bridging function of Guanxi jointly form a mutually supportive workplace high-quality connections network. This network maintained stability in the face of cultural differences and organizational changes and nurtured new collaboration patterns under cultural difference. The mutual reinforcement among the three themes provides multi layered evidence and explains how high-quality connections are established in Sino-Polish teams.

On this basis, the following section continues this study's triangulation strategy by employing a joint display approach to integrate survey data with interview data. By drawing on multiple data sources and perspectives, this integration aims to reveal the convergence,

complementarity, and potential tensions among different methods, further enhancing the credibility and explanatory power of the research conclusions.

4.4 Joint Displays in Mixed Methods Analysis

Building on qualitative and quantitative results. It adopts triangulation as its core objective to compare findings from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The aim is to fully leverage mixed methods and create an integrated platform for visualized presentation. Specifically, the study draws on the joint display integration approach from Cross et al. (2020), combining statistical analyses and thematic findings organically.

In presenting the results, the study examines the regression pathways of key variables toward high-quality connections. These pathways are compared with thematic analyses and illustrative quotations from interview data (Table 29). The integration row explicitly demonstrates how the joint display facilitates the identification of convergence and complementarity between the two data types, thereby revealing the mechanisms underlying the development of positive Sino-Polish coworker relationships. This joint display serves as an essential analytical tool by visually aligning different data sources to deepen systematic interpretation and substantially enhance the clarity, transparency, and theoretical persuasiveness of the research findings.

Table 29: Joint Display for Triangulation of Study 1 and Study 2

Study 1		Study 2		
Hypothesis	Result	Category 1: Embedding Process Capture		
		Themes	Chinese quote example	Polish quote example
ATT ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.220,$ $p < 0.001$	Entry motivations and pathways into Sino-Polish workplaces	“I joined a university program, adapted after graduation, and decided to stay for work.” (CH-6, CH-7)	“I went to China in 2014 to study... After returning, I worked in a Chinese environment and have been connected to the Chinese community for ten years.” (PL-2)

Study 1		Study 2		
Hypothesis	Result	Category 1: Embedding Process Capture		
		Themes	Chinese quote example	Polish quote example
BEL ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.183,$ $p < 0.01$	First encounters and initial impressions	“At the first meeting, they seemed serious... You need to take the initiative to build a closer relationship.” (CH-2, CH-4)	“I did not expect such a warm welcome... Chinese colleagues are hardworking.” (PL-3)
EMBED ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.334,$ $p < 0.001$	Formal and informal workplace networks	“When conflicts arise, I discuss them privately so both sides can accept the outcome.” (CH-3)	“After many years, we can now communicate directly but still need to watch our wording.” (PL-4)
		From language barriers to behavioral adjustment	“Everyday communication is fine, but technical terms and client communication are challenging.” (CH-3)	“At first, they couldn’t speak English... basic communication improved, but professional exchanges remain difficult.” (PL-6)
		Development of cross-cultural friendship	“If you build a personal relationship, it can last for many years.” (PL-7)	“I have very good contacts with Chinese colleagues, they’re smart and always valuable to me.” (PL-5)
Analytical Integration				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The results of Study 1 and Study 2 are highly complementary. Study 1 shows that belonging, attachment, and differentiated embedding significantly positively affected high-quality connections, representing the emotional foundation, relational motivation, and behavioral pathway. Differentiated embedding is a dynamic process from daily cross-cultural interactions. Chinese and Polish Employees adapt by adjusting their communication, joining informal exchanges, and aligning work rhythms. Early warmth builds trust, but long-term collaboration and cultural friction drive deeper adaptation and relationship embedding. 				

Study 1		Study 2		
Hypothesis	Result	Category 2: Guanxi as Relational Strategy		
		Themes	Chinese quote example	Polish quote example
GUANXI ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.570-0.576, p < 0.001$	Renqing	“If a close colleague’s request is reasonable, I’ll help—hoping they may help me in the future.” (CH-3)	“My Chinese colleague quietly covered my small mistakes. I really appreciate that.” (PL-7)
		Ganqing	“Working together over time, my colleague feels like a brother.” (CH-7)	You can feel when Chinese colleagues truly care, more like friends than coworkers.” (PL-5)
		Xinren	“I value whether colleagues are reliable and proactive; trust grows through cooperation.” (CH-4)	“Now, after six years, I feel there is a lot of trust.” (PL-5)
		Mianzi	“We praise colleagues’ good work, so they look good and feel happy.” (CH-7)	“We take on more tasks or finish early to keep a positive image.” (PL-5)
Analytical Integration				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The results of Study 1 and Study 2 are convergence. 2. Study 1 indicates that Guanxi has a significant positive effect on the development of high-quality connections, serving as a key predictor of relationship quality in cross-cultural workplaces. 3. Study 2 reveals that Guanxi, rooted in Renqing, Ganqing, Xinren, and Mianzi, is central to how Chinese employees build trust and cooperation. 4. Polish coworkers gradually recognize and reciprocate this relational approach. 5. Guanxi becomes a localized tool for intercultural adaptation, with Mianzi closely aligning with reputation management in its embedding. 				

Study 1		Study 2		
Hypothesis	Result	Category 3: Building High-Quality Connections through Interaction		
		Themes	Chinese quote example	Polish quote example
GUANXI * ATT ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.250,$ $p < 0.01$	Emotional carrying capacity	“I’m not ashamed to express frustration; colleagues notice my anxiety and comfort me.” (CH-6)	“With close Chinese colleagues, I can express any emotion; trust makes us open.” (PL-1, PL-3)
		Tensility	“We understand their preference for planning; they’ve learned to be flexible.” (CH-6, CH-7)	“I adapted to high-intensity work; they learned to take breaks...still efficient.” (PL-5)
GUANXI * BEL ↓ HQC	$\beta = 0.288,$ $p < 0.001).$	Interdependence and intimacy	“They understand cultural differences, do tasks well, and help readily.” (CH-3)	“I stay in touch with some Chinese colleagues, they are understanding friends.” (PL-1)
		Permanence	“Even after job changes, we keep in touch; they offer warm advice.” (CH-2)	“Work friends will remain for many years—real friends, not just colleagues.” (PL-4, PL-7)
Analytical Integration				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The results of Study1 and Study 2 are strong complementary. 2. Study 1 reveals that Guanxi significantly strengthens the positive effects of belonging and attachment on forming high-quality connections. Chinese and Polish employees build resilient workplace ties through emotional capacity, mutual adjustment, and cultural accommodation. 3. As differentiated embedding and Guanxi deepen, some connections extend beyond work into lasting friendships. 4. Attachment and belonging provide a psychological foundation, while Guanxi reinforces and sustains high-quality coworker relationships. 				

Notes:

- ATT: Attachment feeling
- BEL: Belonging feeling
- EMBED: Differentiated Embedding
- HQC: High-Quality Connection

As illustrated in the joint display (Table 29), this study presents high convergence and complementarity between quantitative and qualitative findings. The quantitative analysis shows that belonging and attachment, as core components of differentiated embedding, significantly contribute to the development of high-quality connections. Meanwhile, Guanxi demonstrates a direct effect within the model and a significant moderating role in its interaction with belonging and attachment, further strengthening the influence of emotional resources on relationship formation. These findings indicate that differentiated embedding is key to improving relationship quality in cross-cultural workplaces. However, the quantitative approach largely remains at the structural level of variable relationships and is limited in its ability to capture the underlying generative logic.

The qualitative results address this gap by revealing the processual nature of workplace relationship building. Belonging and attachment are not static or predetermined psychological states in differentiated embedding. Instead, they evolve through ongoing socialization and accumulate in daily interactions, two-way adjustment, and emotional support. These results show a cyclic mechanism in the Sino-Polish workplace differentiated embedding process: “adaptation–feedback–readjustment” to build positive relationships. This cycle outlines the dynamic relational, spatial, and temporal processes that construct positive workplace relationships. Through integrated analysis, this study addresses RQ1, RQ2, and RQ4. Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees gradually strengthened their sense of belonging and attachment. The continuous mutual adjustment and adaptation between both sides illustrate a gradual process of relational convergence and the potential for future friendship. This differentiated embedding process highlights its critical role in promoting high-quality connections.

Second, Guanxi is a cultural tool and normative system with “Renqing, Ganqing, Xinren, and Mianzi.” This system shapes the relational behavior of Chinese self-initiated expatriates. Polish coworkers gradually understand, internalize, and respond to it through long-term collaboration. While Polish employees may not inherently have the cultural logic of Guanxi, they start to embody its core through emotional reciprocity, mutual assistance, and reputation

practices. This shows the cross-cultural transferability and localization of Guanxi. This conclusion addresses RQ3 by showing how both sides engage in Guanxi transmission and adaptation. Chinese self-initiated expatriates introduce Guanxi, expecting to build positive, lasting relationships. Through continuous interaction, Polish employees gradually recognize similarities between their own relational practices and the principles of Guanxi. Both sides learn to adapt to this relational skill. Guanxi becomes a shared mechanism that fosters workplace embedding and the development of high-quality connections.

Furthermore, the joint analysis shows that relationship formation is neither balanced nor symmetrical. Chinese and Polish employees differ structurally in language proficiency, cultural discursive power, and motivation for adaptation. These factors create asymmetries in the embedding process. They also create opportunities for deeper cultural negotiation and emotional investment. Qualitative narratives reveal that Chinese self-initiated expatriates often show a proactive attitude toward embedding. Polish employees gradually respond with recognition and appreciation over time. This gradual engagement strengthens Sino-Polish coworker relationships, with high emotional carrying capacity and tensility. Ultimately, both sides develop high-quality connections marked by mutual understanding, emotional resilience, and sustained interpersonal trust, as expected for RQ5.

Triangulation analysis involves the mutual verification of quantitative and qualitative findings. It promotes theoretical integration and empirical depth. The quantitative analysis clarifies the structural logic and predictive effects among variables. The qualitative analysis enriches these structures with cultural meaning and relational warmth. It reveals the underlying mechanisms of relationship generation and evolution in Sino-Polish workplaces. These findings show that forming high-quality connections is not instantaneous. Instead, it is realized through continuous interaction, emotional investment, and relational negotiation in a multicultural context. This process forms a core mechanism for developing positive relationships in Sino-Polish workplaces. It also lays the foundation for subsequent theoretical interpretations and practical recommendations.

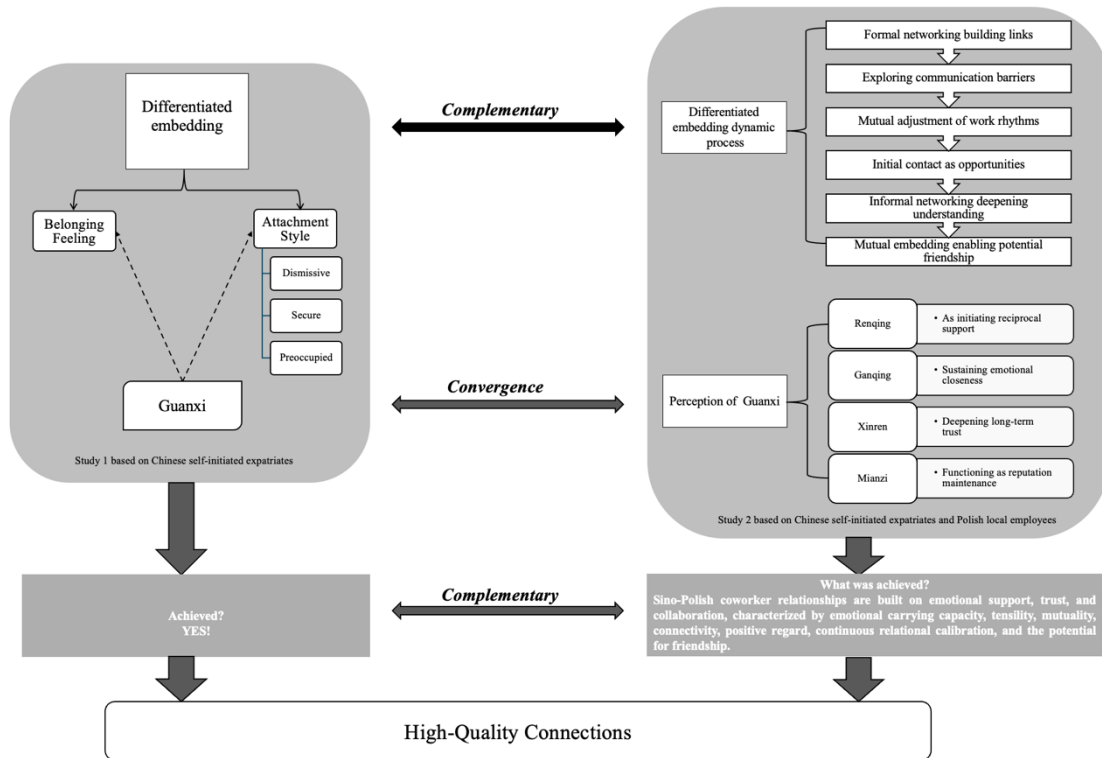
The next chapter will further discuss and interpret the implications and mechanisms derived from the findings.

Chapter5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data from Chinese self-initiated expatriates working in Poland and qualitative interviews with Polish employees to investigate the mechanisms underlying the construction and maintenance of high-quality connections in Sino-Polish workplaces. Study 1 identifies the key variables and their statistical relationships, while Study 2 provides interpretive depth by explaining the underlying cultural and emotional mechanisms revealed through the interviews.

The integrated findings show that dynamic interactions between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees play a key role in facilitating differentiated embedding, pivotal for fostering and sustaining high-quality connections. The study further reveals that Guanxi not only forms high-quality connections directly but also strengthens the positive effects of belonging and attachment through interactive dynamics, highlighting the synergy between emotional resources and relational capital in a cross-cultural context. As Figure 11 shows, the two strands reinforce each other's insights and offer complementary, convergent perspectives that reveal the emergence and maintenance of positive relationships in Sino-Polish workplace interactions.

Figure 11: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings



Building upon these results as shown in Figure 11, the following sections will discuss this research’s theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, and potential directions for future inquiry.

5.1 Theory Contribution

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to cross-cultural self-initiated expatriation and organizational behavior. It does so by integrating the differentiated embedding framework, which includes belonging and attachment, with theories of Guanxi and high-quality connections. The differentiated embedding framework is a frontier theory in cross-cultural expatriate research. It emphasizes that belonging and attachment are not static psychological states. Instead, they are dynamic, interrelated negotiation processes (Ryan et al., 2015). To the best of the author’s knowledge, this research is among the first to systematically apply cutting-edge attachment and belongingness questionnaire instruments to a sample of Chinese self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). This approach addresses the limitations of prior studies, which

relied mainly on qualitative interviews or social-gram mapping techniques (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014; Ryan, 2018; Habti, 2021).

This study fills an important gap in expatriate research, especially in the underexplored area of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). Research on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) has long been limited, due to their self-chosen and self-driven nature, and has remained at the margins of scholarly attention. This study makes a novel contribution by situating Chinese self-initiated expatriates within the Sino-Polish workplace context by examining their motivations for entering cross-cultural workplaces (such as bicultural affinity-driven, cross-cultural experience-driven, and serendipitous entry) and their subsequent adjustment processes. It further reveals how, without direct organizational support, Chinese self-initiated expatriates gradually achieve cross-cultural embedding through belonging, attachment, and relational resources such as Guanxi.

From the perspective of the Sino-Polish coworker relationship, attachment theory holds that individuals construct meaning through personal, group, and cultural processes within specific contexts, forming affective bonds to the workplace and experiencing comfort and security (Bruny et al., 2023). Building on this foundation, the study further explores how different attachment styles (dismissive, secure, preoccupied) relate to the development of high-quality connections and the various dimensions of Guanxi. The findings reveal differentiated effects of these attachment styles in multicultural workplaces and lay the groundwork for future empirical studies of attachment theory in diverse organizational settings.

Quantitative results also indicate that enhancing belonging significantly accelerates the formation of positive intercultural relationships, which could potentially contribute to expatriates' stronger organizational commitment and identification. These results align with Helena Lo's (2012) findings, reaffirming the central role of belonging in cross-cultural organizational management.

Addressing Ryan's focus on the evolving and reversible nature of differentiated embedding, this study examines how belonging and attachment unfold over time and across contexts. Qualitative interviews show that the embedding process of Chinese and Polish coworkers is

shaped by temporal (e.g., relationship evolution), spatial (e.g., adaptation to cultural environments), and relational (e.g., quality of coworker interactions) dimensions. Previous research has highlighted that positive interactions between expatriates and host-country employees enhance relational bonds, reciprocity, and team cohesion (Bonache et al., 2016; Maertz et al., 2016; Toh, 2003, 2012; Chun-Hsiao Wang, 2018). This study confirms these findings and refines our understanding of how positive interaction facilitates embedding, deepening employees from different cultural backgrounds' sense of attachment and belonging.

Wessendorf and Phillimore (2018) also stress that workplace-based relationships play a critical role in migrants' social integration and embedding. Consistently, the qualitative findings in this study demonstrate that Polish coworkers can be considered a source of support and "social resources" for Chinese self-initiated expatriates, facilitating their smoother embedding into the workplace and the broader host society.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the differentiated embedding process from both sides of coworkers in Sino-Polish workplaces. Rather than a unidirectional process, it unfolds as a dynamic, two-way mechanism of continuous interaction and mutual adjustment. In this process, Chinese self-initiated expatriates proactively adapt to the Polish workplace culture. Polish employees also modify their behaviors over time and begin to localize and engage in relational practices such as Guanxi. As Fee and Michailova (2021) suggest, host-country employees' workplace adjustments may include providing alternative communication modes and working styles for expatriates, mimicking their practices, or re-evaluating their ways of working from a new perspective. While existing studies often focus on expatriates' adaptation, this study examines host-country employees' adaptation experiences and role transformations in cross-cultural workplaces, addressing a notable research gap.

Theoretically, from a Guanxi perspective to the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first to empirically test the moderating role of Guanxi between differentiated embedding and high-quality connections in a quantitative model in Sino-Polish workplaces. In addition, the qualitative analysis explores how Guanxi is reinterpreted and localized in intercultural contexts. Existing studies on Guanxi primarily focus on Chinese domestic settings or overseas

Chinese communities, examining its influence on Chinese actors' behaviors, or reflecting host-country perceptions of Chinese relational behavior, often as a reference point for cross-cultural management (e.g., Linka, 2013; Dębczyńska, 2017; Bańka-Orłowska, 2020). However, this study is the first to investigate the mechanisms of Guanxi in Sino-Polish intercultural workplaces.

Quantitative results indicate that Ganqing and Renqing are highly and significantly correlated with key dimensions of high-quality connections, such as mutuality, connectivity, tensility, and positive regard. Xinren also shows a significant positive correlation with mutuality and positive regard, although with relatively lower strength. These findings suggest that in the early and transitional stages of cross-cultural team development, Ganqing and Renqing, representing emotional and reciprocal elements, are more easily translated into mutual support and bonding. In contrast, deeper trust (Xinren) requires sustained interaction to develop.

Regression analyses further confirm the direct positive effect of Guanxi on high-quality connections and its significant amplifying role in the relationship between belonging and attachment and high-quality connections. The results fill a notable gap in the empirical, quantitative investigation of Guanxi within Sino-Polish workplace settings.

From the perspective of Guanxi's core dimensions, Renqing is a cultural norm of mutual obligation and a key initiator of positive relationships between Chinese and Polish employees. Its mechanism spans both work-related supports. Renqing is often accompanied by Ganqing, which serves as the emotional foundation sustaining the depth and durability of relationships. Both concepts embody the emotional dimension of Guanxi. Like mutuality in the high-quality connections framework, Renqing in Sino-Polish interactions entails reciprocity and affective commitment. However, the expectations associated with Renqing in the Chinese context are deeply rooted in Confucian ethics and institutionalized social norms, allowing for considerable elasticity. Violations of Renqing damage interpersonal ties and may lead to breaches of social norms and declines in trust (Wong et al., 2007). While Polish employees also value reciprocity, their expectations differ culturally, and this often results in a dual process of pressure and adaptation during the early stages of relationship building.

Secondly, Xinren (trust), as another core component of Guanxi, corresponds closely with Bedford's (2022) distinction between calculative trust and experiential trust. In the Sino-Polish workplace, there is a widespread presence of functional Xinren (also a form of conditional trust) based on competence and professionalism, which can be established relatively quickly. In contrast, deeper experiential Xinren requires long-term, repeated interactions which are full of emotional exchanges and reciprocity based on Ganqing and Renqing. The results from both regression analysis and qualitative interviews consistently show that while Xinren tends to be limited in the early phases of cross-cultural work settings, it can gradually evolve through continuous, positive reciprocal interactions into deeper trust, thereby reinforcing Guanxi and sustaining the long-term development of high-quality connections. As Lewicka (2015) noted, trust among employees may be related to an "increasing cohesion of a group resulting from mutual relations, communication, bonding, and growing trust" (p. 95)

Furthermore, this study incorporates Mianzi (face) into the cross-cultural framework of guanxi, treating it as a culturally specific form of reputation management. Deeply embedded in Confucian ideology, Mianzi emphasizes maintaining social harmony within one's interpersonal network (Wang et al., 2005). Chinese participants in this study frequently mentioned Mianzi, confirming its central behavioral role. More importantly, this research found that Mianzi is not exclusive to Chinese culture, and similar patterns were observed among Polish employees. Although the level of contextual communication in Polish culture differs from that of China, Polish employees likewise engage in proactive Mianzi behaviors, such as maintaining coworker dignity and proactively demonstrating competence. As such, the study argues that a form of proactive Mianzi also exists in Polish workplace culture and plays a significant role. This finding expands the scope of guanxi theory under multicultural conditions. It is the first to reveal the localized functions of Mianzi in Sino-Polish work settings, filling a significant literature gap.

Finally, within the specific mechanisms of relationship building in Sino-Polish cross-cultural workplaces, high-quality connections represent the essence of positive relationships in Sino-Polish workplaces. According to high-quality connections theory, emotional support, mutual

trust, and collaboration among coworkers are critical foundations for individual embedding, team cohesion, and organizational innovation (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003; Carmeli et al., 2009). Based on Carmeli et al.'s (2009) five-dimensional framework, this study measured high-quality connections between Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish local employees in the Sino-Polish workplace.

Quantitative analysis reveals strong correlations between all high-quality connections sub-dimensions and both Guanxi and differentiated embedding constructs. Differentiated embedding significantly impacted high-quality connections, demonstrating that expatriates' differentiated embedding is vital to building positive workplace relationships. While existing literature has focused on how expatriates establish ties to facilitate social integration (e.g., Driss Habti, 2021; Ryan and Mulholland, 2014; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019), this study is the first to investigate this topic and empirically test within a Sino-Polish context, the positive effects of belonging and attachment on high-quality connections through regression analysis, while considering Guanxi as a moderating factor, thereby filling a significant empirical gap.

Quantitative findings indicate that sustained interactions between Chinese and Polish employees foster emotional carrying capacity, reflected in the freedom to express and receive emotions, as well as a positive affective tone within teams. In the face of cultural clash and workstyle differences, team members actively adjust their behaviors and expressions to avoid conflict, demonstrating tensility, which is the elasticity and resilience of the relationship. During collaboration, both mutuality and connectivity are continuously reinforced, and through positive regard, individuals recognize each other's contributions and value, ultimately achieving high-quality relational bonds. This process not only supports Dutton and Heaphy's (2003) theory of relational resilience and adaptive teams but also echoes Allen and Turner de Tormes (2012) and Glińska-Neweś and Wińska (2013), who emphasized that high-quality connections are formed through long-term cooperation, emotional investment, and sustained relational calibration. It further corroborates Major and Spalek's (2022) conceptualization of positive relationships, which highlights freedom in "expressing opinions, a positive vibe of

cooperation, and a high degree of trust” within the team as the three most important factors shaping positive relations among members (p.390).

Moreover, this study highlights the crucial role of communication and mutual understanding in building positive Sino-Polish workplace relationships. China is widely recognized as a high-context, relationship-oriented culture shaped by the norms of Guanxi, whereas Poland represents a moderate group situated between high-context and low-context communication patterns (Bartosik-Purgat and Rakowska, 2025). This observation aligns closely with the findings of this study, which reveal that intercultural workplace interactions between Chinese and Polish employees are characterized by the coexistence and negotiation of distinct communication norms.

The findings also reveal that language barriers are a challenge for both Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees. A certain level of language proficiency is essential for expatriates’ cultural integration and successful adaptation (Dang et al., 2022). The importance of language for expatriates has long been recognized. However, limited research has examined how host-country employees perceive and respond to linguistic differences, and how these perceptions affect social dynamics and cultural assimilation (Lamba et al., 2022). Bhatti and Alzahrani (2023) further emphasize that “bridging cultural gaps and promoting mutual understanding can be achieved through communication and exchange initiatives between host countries and expatriate populations” (p. 109). In line with these insights, this study also finds that effective intercultural communication requires mutual adaptation and adjustment from both Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees.

Furthermore, in multilingual and diverse workplaces, language switching emerges as a fascinating phenomenon. In this study, Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish employees naturally switch between their majority languages during interactions. As Socarraz-Novoa (2015) points out, language switching in the workplace carries significant interpersonal meaning, as coworkers tend to respect each other’s primary language of communication. However, when new participants join a conversation, the language may shift depending on their identity, role, and preference.

Therefore, the combination of high-context communication styles (Levitt, 2022; Zakaria and Ab Rahma, 2022), interactive networking (Adler and Aycan, 2018), the navigation of language barriers (Bhatti and Alzahrani, 2023), and the strategic switching between majority languages (de Socarraz-Novoa, 2015; Seitz and Smith, 2022) provides rich empirical grounding for theories of high-context cultures and cross-cultural communication.

In summary, this research extends the application boundaries of high-quality connections and differentiated embedding in Sino-Polish workplaces and empirically verifies the cross-cultural applicability and underlying mechanisms of both high-quality connections and Guanxi theories in the Polish cultural setting. The findings provide a replicable theoretical model and methodological pathway for future studies on relationship building in multicultural organizations and international teams, laying a solid foundation for further cross-cultural comparative research.

5.2 Practical Implications

The practical contributions of this study are primarily directed toward two groups: (1) Chinese enterprises planning to enter the Polish market and employ Chinese self-initiated expatriate workers, and (2) Polish enterprises that employ Chinese self-initiated in local organizations and collaborate with them daily. Accordingly, the practical implications are discussed considering the model proposed in this research.

First, the findings indicate that enhancing differentiated embedding, particularly through belonging and attachment, significantly promotes the establishment of high-quality connections in cross-cultural workplaces. This suggests that team integration should not remain a one-way process of embedding by Chinese employees but instead adopt a “two-way adjustment” strategy: on the one hand, supporting Chinese employees in understanding and adapting to the local cultural and institutional context; on the other hand, guiding Polish employees to appreciate and adapt to the communicative preferences and cultural norms of their Chinese colleagues. In practice, formal and informal interactions, whether inside or outside the workplace, foster a friendly and supportive atmosphere among coworkers (Morton, 2019). Therefore, this study

recommends the establishment of dual support mechanisms across work and non-work contexts, providing intercultural communication training, and culturally sensitive recognition of personal contributions and reputation management. Such measures can accelerate trust-building, reduce cultural frictions, and enhance team cohesion, strengthening belonging and attachment in cross-cultural workplaces.

Second, regarding the culturally specific Guanxi construct, this study provides an actionable framework for its contextualized understanding and application, emphasizing emotional reciprocity, trust, and the management of Mianzi. Given the coexistence of both commonalities and differences in guanxi practices between Chinese and Polish employees, organizational practice should balance the reciprocity-oriented logic of Chinese culture with the direct communication and rule orientation of Polish culture. Integrating the indirect “mind-flick” style standard in Chinese contexts with the directness preferred in Polish settings can minimize ambiguity while avoiding relational harm.

Third, the study highlights the need to identify and address potential barriers to communication and integration at the early stage of Sino-Polish cooperation. Language barriers remain one of the central challenges in multicultural workplaces. At the same time, small ethnic-based clusters and informal social groups are also common and may constrain resource sharing and team cohesion. To prevent such dynamics from solidifying into structural barriers, organizations are advised to implement institutionalized arrangements from the outset, such as sustained language support and training, cross-cultural mixed teams, and inclusive social activities for all employees. These measures can improve collaboration efficiency and enhance perceptions of fairness.

Overall, by combining the differentiated embedding and high-quality connections management pathway with the contextualized application of Guanxi, this study provides a set of building positive relationship strategies for talent mobility and international collaboration in globalization. These strategies can enhance organizational performance and workplace relationship. Significantly, the applicability of this framework extends beyond the Sino-Polish context to other multicultural workplaces involving Chinese employees. At the same time,

Guanxi, through its emphasis on reciprocity, trust, and face management, acts as an additional adhesive for cross-cultural teams. Consequently, this study provides academia with a transferable theoretical model for cross-contextual testing and offers practitioners actionable, adaptable, and generalizable tools for managing cross-cultural workplace relationships.

5.3 Limitations

This study has limitations, which can be summarized in three main aspects: the relatively small sample size and the rarity of survey-based research in this context, the limitations of the statistical methods applied, and the potential subjectivity and cultural constraints inherent in the interview data.

First, regarding sample size, the quantitative data were collected from Chinese self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) working in Poland. This group is already very limited in scale within the Polish context, and the outflow of highly skilled expatriates following the COVID-19 pandemic further reduced the available research population. As a result, the small sample size became one of the most prominent limitations of this study. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this study is the first to introduce validated quantitative measurement tools for attachment and belonging among this group, filling an important empirical gap in previous research. Nevertheless, due to constraints in sample size and recruitment channels, the generalizability of the findings to other groups and contexts remains limited. Future research should adopt broader strategies for data collection, such as forming multinational research collaborations to conduct parallel surveys in different countries or using hybrid online and offline recruitment channels to expand sample coverage. Longitudinal tracking designs could also monitor changes across different stages, enhancing the conclusions' external validity and stability.

Second, in terms of statistical methods, this study primarily employed regression analysis to examine relationships among key variables. While this approach can identify statistical associations, it has limited explanatory power and cannot establish causal mechanisms or capture more complex relational pathways. This limitation is particularly pronounced when studying multi-level, cross-cultural variables, where cultural factors may operate through

mediating or moderating mechanisms that correlation analysis cannot detect. Future studies should incorporate more advanced and widely recognized methods in organizational behavior and cross-cultural management research, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), or Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM), to uncover potential causal pathways and interaction effects. Additionally, including control variables (e.g., tenure, hierarchical position) and contextual variables (e.g., industry characteristics, cultural distance) would strengthen the analytical framework.

Third, on the qualitative side, the interview data may have been influenced by social desirability bias and the subjective tendencies of participants' self-expression. Within specific cultural contexts, individuals may engage in self-censorship or emotional restraint when speaking in public or to external researchers (Hayati and Sinha., 2024). This phenomenon makes it more difficult to fully capture the long-term evolution of belonging, attachment, and guanxi. For example, the Chinese respondents' emphasis on "concern for reputation" among respondents may indicate that some participants provided neutral or socially acceptable answers to sensitive questions rather than disclosing their genuine feelings. To mitigate such biases, future research could adopt multi-source data triangulation, such as direct observational records, sociograms, group interaction observations, and longitudinal analyses.

5.4 Future Research Directions

This study offers several potential avenues for advancing research on building positive relationships in cross-cultural workplaces. Based on its findings and limitations, this section explores specific directions and paths.

First, the research design assumed that Chinese and Polish employees worked in the same physical space daily, with face-to-face interactions as the primary means of building positive relationships. However, the rise of hybrid working models in the post-pandemic era has fundamentally reshaped relational structures and modes of interaction within organizations. As Włodarkiewicz-Klimek (2021) suggested, hybrid work arrangements are expected to become a defining feature of future work organization, especially in office settings. Prior studies indicate

that hybrid working can strengthen relational resilience by reducing commuting fatigue and increasing flexibility, yet it may simultaneously weaken spontaneous encounters, reduce opportunities for informal communication, and fragment social networks (Lee, 2021; Sævarsson, 2022; van Woudenberg-Swicegood, 2024). In cross-cultural contexts, these challenges become more complex: employees from different cultural backgrounds must not only adapt to changes in work pace and communication style, but also navigate divergent norms, task execution styles, and social practices. Such differences may amplify the relational barriers posed by hybrid work. Future research could incorporate hybrid working as a contextual variable within the differentiated embedding, Guanxi, and high-quality connection framework. Future research should examine how cross-cultural coworker relationships are constructed, maintained, and repaired in hybrid workplaces.

Second, this study developed and validated the Differentiated Embedding Model in the context of Sino-Polish workplaces. However, national cultures, industry characteristics, and organizational systems may constrain its applicability. Future research could thus test Differentiated Embedding's generalizability across varying levels of cultural distance, institutional divergence, and industry characteristics (e.g., manufacturing vs. services, startups vs. established firms). Also, cross-national comparisons, such as Sino-German and Sino-Polish team comparisons, would further illuminate the differentiated embedding process under different cultural bases.

Third, although the attachment and belonging scales used here were rigorously translated, back translated, further refinement is needed to fully capture the multidimensional nature of differentiated embedding. Future studies could build on these tools by developing new measurement tools in differentiated embedding, incorporating qualitative interviews and cross-cultural validation procedures. This would allow for more precise validation of differentiated embedding in diverse contexts.

Finally, although this study examined the role of Guanxi in cross-cultural workplaces, it did not systematically measure how Polish employees perceive, interpret, and enact Guanxi. As a relational mechanism rooted in Chinese cultural values, trust patterns, and interaction norms,

Guanxi may diverge significantly from non-Chinese employees' cognitive frames and behavioral logics. Future research should, therefore, develop culturally sensitive instruments to assess non-Chinese perceptions and practices of Guanxi and cover cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.

Conclusions

This study examined the differentiated embedding process of Chinese Self-initiated expatriates and Polish local employees in cross-cultural workplaces, focusing on the moderating role of Guanxi in building positive coworker relationships. Given the limited attention in existing research to the mechanisms underlying the development of positive relationships in cross-cultural contexts and the absence of empirical studies in the Sino-Polish setting, this study makes significant theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions.

At the theoretical level, the study introduces the differentiated embedding model into the Sino-Polish workplace context, enriching the theoretical framework for understanding cross-cultural relationship-building. It also systematically applies measurement tools for attachment and belonging to this group for the first time, validating their effects on high-quality connections. By incorporating Guanxi as a cross-cultural moderating mechanism, this study further deepens the understanding of how Guanxi practices function, adapt, and vary within Sino-Polish workplaces, offering a novel analytical lens for research on cross-cultural organizational behavior.

The study adopts a convergent parallel mixed methods design at the methodological level, integrating qualitative and quantitative analyses and employing triangulation to ensure convergence and complementarity between findings. This approach strengthens the robustness and explanatory depth of the conclusions and provides a replicable pathway for future studies on cross-cultural coworker relationships.

At the practical level, the study uncovers the differentiated mechanisms through which employees in Sino-Polish workplaces construct relationships, build trust, and manage conflicts, offering concrete insights for cross-cultural management. For instance, organizations can draw on the “dual adjustment” strategy proposed in this research: supporting Chinese employees in adapting to Polish workplace culture and guiding Polish employees to understand and accommodate Chinese coworkers’ communication preferences and cultural norms. By

fostering formal and informal interaction opportunities, organizations can accelerate trust-building, reduce cultural friction, and enhance team cohesion and performance.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence on the construction of positive relationships in the Sino-Polish workplace. It lays theoretical and methodological foundations for future research on relational mechanisms in multicultural organizational contexts. Its findings offer a fresh perspective on how individuals and organizations can collaborate effectively across cultural boundaries in the era of globalization, and open new pathways for advancing cross-cultural management research.

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Appendix 1: Code Book

Themes	Code	Definition
Entry motivations and pathways into Sino-Polish workplaces (spatial embedding)	Bicultural affinity driven entry	The interviewee enters the Sino-Polish workplace due to sustained exposure to and a positive orientation toward either Chinese or Polish culture, showing cultural understanding and readiness.
	Cross-cultural experience driven entry	The interviewee joins the Sino-Polish workplace with prior international or multicultural experience, showing openness, adaptability, and cultural awareness.
	Serendipitous entry	The interviewee enters the Sino-Polish workplace through job opportunities or life circumstances without prior planning. The quality of embedding depends on subsequent interpersonal interactions.
First encounters and initial impressions (relational embedding)	Impressions: diligent, serious, friendly	Chinese employees' first impressions of their Polish coworkers as diligent, serious, and friendly.
	Impressions: Warmth and friendliness	Polish employees' first impressions of their Chinese coworkers as warm and friendly.
	Impressions: cautious attitude toward emotional expression	Polish employees perceived Chinese warmth positively but sometimes questioned its depth, interpreting it through contextual clues.
Formal and informal workplace networks (spatial embedding)	Formal network: cooperation norms	Through exploration, learning, and adjustment, both sides develop interaction norms suited to the Sino-Polish workplace.
	Formal network: communication styles adjustment	In formal work interactions, both sides gradually adapt their communication styles by overcoming cultural differences.

Themes	Code	Definition
Formal and informal workplace networks (spatial embedding)	Informal network: emotional exchange and social bonding	Through shared food, celebrations, gifts and casual conversations, both sides build emotional closeness, reinforcing attachment and belonging.
	Informal network: Integration through daily sociability	Over time, continuous social interactions in daily life led to deeper mutual integration between both sides.
From language barriers to behavioral adjustment (temporal embedding)	Language barriers and communication stress	Language differences serve as the most prominent initial cross-cultural barrier, often causing misunderstanding and anxiety in professional and client communications.
	Majority language exclusion	In multilingual settings, the dominance of either Chinese or Polish leads to the exclusion of the other side from information flow, reducing their sense of inclusion and participation.
	Contrasting work pace and boundary perceptions	Chinese employees emphasize collective responsibility and flexibility, while Polish employees value efficiency, rules, and clear work-life boundaries, reflecting two distinct logics.
The development of cross-cultural friendship (relational embedding)	Professional continuity over personal closeness	Most Chinese and Polish employees value future contact primarily for professional purposes rather than deep personal friendship.
	Friendship as instrumental connection	Relationships are often viewed as potential business or collaboration resources, with social ties carrying practical value.
	Weak ties and mutual acceptance	Relationships remain weak ties, continuous cooperation and mutual understanding gradually build trust and emotional recognition.
Renqing	Daily Renqing practices	Renqing is manifested through everyday assistance such as helping with errands, caregiving, or gift-giving, maintaining emotional ties through actions.

Themes	Code	Definition
Renqing	Delayed Renqing	Refers to delayed reciprocity, acts of kindness given with the expectation of future, rather than immediate return.
	Renqing insurance	Exchange of gifts and everyday care builds relational networks, also providing personal psychological comfort, security, and trust.
	Renqing pressure	While Polish employees appreciate kindness, they may also perceive implicit expectations of reciprocity, leading to stress.
Ganqing	Ganqing: accumulation by daily interactions	Emotional bonds are gradually built through long-term collaboration and mutual support, forming the affective basis for stable and trusting relationships.
	Ganqing: work support	Long-term relationships foster Ganqing to provide emotional and psychological support in the workplace.
	Ganqing: daily support	Care and concern extend beyond the workplace into personal or social contexts concern.
	Ganqing: transformation into friendship	The deepening of Ganqing transforms work-oriented relations into positive patterns of trust, care, and shared growth.
Xinren	Surface-level Xinren	Trust limited to the Sino-Polish workplace context, where resource sharing is based on task completion rather than personal closeness.
	Functional Xinren	Trust built on mutual reliability, fulfillment of commitments, and personal ability in addressing problems.
	Conditional Xinren	Deeper trust that requires time to develop, especially when involving personal matters or organizational confidentiality.

Themes	Code	Definition
Mianzi	Proactive Mianzi orientation	Actively taking on tasks and responsibilities to demonstrate competence and diligence in front of colleagues and supervisors.
	Defensive Mianzi orientation	Avoiding public criticism or open acknowledgment of mistakes at the workplace, as exposing errors or apologizing publicly is considered inappropriate.
Emotional carrying capacity	Gradual emotional openness	Emotional expression becomes more open as familiarity grows, shifting from restraint to natural sharing of both positive and negative feelings.
	Positive emotion expression	The extent to which positive emotions can be freely expressed in the workplace.
	Negative emotion expression	The extent to which negative emotions can be freely expressed in the workplace.
	Selective emotional expression	Emotional openness varies depending on relational closeness and individual personality traits.
Tensility	Negotiation of work boundaries	Redefining and adjusting acceptable working hours, habits, and task expectations to accommodate cultural differences.
	Two-way behavioral adaptation	Through long-term interaction, both sides gradually understand and respect each other's work pace and communication styles, forming a balanced collaborative norm.
	Adaptive communication learning	Gradual mutual adaptation between implicit Chinese and explicit Polish communication preferences.
	Mind flick	Giving subtle hints to assign tasks or express intentions while avoiding direct psychological pressure.
	Read air	Developing the ability to interpret implicit messages and emotional cues in intercultural communication.

Themes	Code	Definition
Interdependence and intimacy	Reciprocal trust and support	Mutual willingness to assist, cover, and emotionally support each other, forming reliable coworker relationships.
	Emotional responsiveness and care	Attentiveness to colleagues' emotions and readiness to offer empathy or practical help during stressful situations.
	Workplace relationships extending beyond work	Professional relationships that develop into personal friendships or social interactions outside the workplace.
Permanence	Boundary awareness in intimacy	Maintaining professionalism and cultural boundaries even within close and trusting relationships.
	Sustained contact beyond work	Continuous communication and care between Chinese and Polish coworkers even after job or departmental changes.
	Transformation from collegial ties to friendship	Long-term collaboration that evolves into personal friendships and emotional bonds.
	Mutual recognition of relationship value	Both sides perceive their coworker relationships as meaningful and worth preserving

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this research. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of workplace experiences and interactions between Chinese and Polish employees, to contribute to building more positive and effective Sino-Polish workplaces.

Your responses will be based on your personal experiences. In addition to basic demographic questions, the questionnaire consists of two main sections with a total of 62 items. There are no right or wrong answers; what matters is your honest perspective.

All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic research purposes. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

I am sincerely appreciating your patience and valuable contribution to this study.

1. What is your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female

2. What is your highest level of education completed (including current enrollment)?

- A. Junior high school or below
- B. High school
- C. Bachelor
- D. Master
- E. Doctoral

3. What is your commonly used working language? (You may select more than one)

- A. Chinese
- B. English
- C. Polish

4. How many years have you lived in Poland?

- A. 1–3 years
- B. 4–7 years
- C. 7–10 years
- D. 10–13 years
- E. 13–15 years

5. The enterprise you work for in Poland belongs to:

- A. Chinese enterprise
- B. Polish enterprise

Part I: Workplace Belonging and Attachment Style

Thank you for answering the previous questions. We will now begin the first part of the questionnaire. This section contains 27 statements about your workplace experiences and interactions with Polish coworkers. Please indicate the extent to which each statement applies to you, using a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Strongly agree).

(workplace belongingness scale)

1. I am able to work in this organization without sacrificing my principles.
2. I use to refer as “we/us” rather than “they/them” when I refer my organization to outsiders.
3. I feel that there is a semblance between my organization and my own values and beliefs.
4. I generally carry more positive emotions than the negative ones during my job.
5. Being a part of this organization inspires me to do more than what is expected.
6. In my work unit I have many common themes with my co-workers.
7. Fairness is maintained while executing rules and policies in my organization.
8. My personal needs are well met by my organization.
9. Whenever I have any personal or professional issues my organization extends necessary help and support.
10. My career goals are well considered by my organization.
11. My organization tries to make my job as exciting and promising as possible.
12. Accomplishments at work are adequately rewarded in my organization.

(workplace attachment style scale)

Dismissive style

1. In my organization, I prefer to avoid certain places, even if that interferes with my work.
2. Nothing would make me stay at my workplace longer than necessary.
3. I dread going back to my workplace after a holiday.
4. I prefer not to go to certain places in my organization.
5. I tend to put off going to my workplace.

Secure style

1. I'm attached to my workplace.
2. I would find it very difficult to leave my workplace for good.
3. My workplace is like me.
4. I enjoy the time that I spend in my workplace.
5. I wouldn't enjoy working in another place as much.

Preoccupied style

1. I often feel anxious in my workplace.
2. Just thinking about my workplace makes me feel anxious.
3. I find it difficult to feel at ease at my workplace.
4. Some places in my organization bring back bad memories.
5. I sometimes feel oppressed by my workplace.

Part II: Coworker Relationships and Guanxi

We will now begin the second part of the questionnaire. This section contains 30 statements about your feelings toward Polish coworkers and your views on guanxi. Please indicate the extent to which each statement applies to you, using a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Strongly agree).

(High Quality Connections Scale)

Emotional carrying capacity

1. My co-workers and I do not have any difficulty expressing our feelings to each other.
2. We are not afraid to express unpleasant feelings at work.
3. Whenever anyone at work expresses an unpleasant feeling, she/he always does so in a constructive manner.
4. If someone gets upset with other co-workers, she/he knows they will try to understand her/him. I am able to express my frustrations without offending anyone.

Tensility

1. We cope well with the conflicts we experience at work.
2. We cope well with the tensions we experience at work.
3. We cope well with the pressures experienced at work.
4. Even during times of stress and pressure, we always manage to find effective solutions.

Connectivity

1. We are always open to listening to our co-workers' new ideas.
2. We are very open to diverse influences, even if they come from unconventional sources, such as new employees, customers, etc.
3. We are attentive to new opportunities that can make our system more efficient and effective.
4. We know how to accept people who are different.

Positive regard

1. I feel that my co-workers like me.
2. I feel that my co-workers and I try to develop meaningful relationships with one another.
3. I feel that my co-workers understand me.

Mutuality

1. The relationship between my co-workers and myself is based on mutuality.
2. We are committed to one another at work.
3. There is a sense of empathy among my co-workers and myself.
4. I feel that my co-workers and I do things for one another.

(Guanxi scale)

Ganqing

1. My Polish coworker's representative and I am able to talk openly as friends.
2. If I were to change my work environment, I would lose good Polish friends.
3. I would consider whether my Polish coworker's feelings would be hurt before I made an important decision.
4. I would try my best to help out my Polish coworker's representative when she/he is need because she/he is a friend of mine.

Renqing

1. I feel a sense of obligation to this Polish coworker's representative for doing her/him a favor.
2. I think that "calling in" favors is part of doing business with Polish coworker's representative.
3. The practice of "give and take" of favors a key part of the relationship between my Polish coworker's representative and me.
4. I am happy to do a favor for Polish coworker's representative, when she/he is in need.

Xinren (reverse-coded items)

1. Polish coworker's representative is only concerned about herself/himself. *
2. The Chinese people at my work environment do not trust Polish coworkers. *
3. The Polish coworker's representative is not trustworthy. *

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your time, effort, and honest responses are greatly valued. The information you have provided will contribute to a deeper understanding of workplace experiences and interactions between Chinese and Polish employees and will help promote the development of more positive and effective cross-cultural workplaces.

Your participation has been essential to the success of this research, and I am sincerely grateful for your valuable contribution.

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Chinese self-initiated expatriates

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Chinese and Polish employees work together in the workplace. I am particularly interested in exploring coworker relationships in the context of cultural integration between China and Poland.

As someone with valuable experience in Sino-Polish workplaces, your insights are highly valuable, and I would like to invite you to openly share your thoughts and feelings.

Before we begin, I would like to emphasize that this interview is conducted solely for research purposes. Your responses will remain strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone in your company. Neither your name nor your company's name will appear in any publications resulting from this research.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview (audio and video) to ensure accuracy in data collection.

Opening Questions

Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

How long have you been working with Polish colleagues?

Theme 1: Differentiated Embedding in the Workplace

A. Migration and Cultural Experience

1. What were the main reasons for choosing to work in Poland?
2. How did you feel when you first entered the Polish workplace?
3. Do you participate in cultural events or traditional celebrations with Polish people? If yes, which ones?
4. Do you think these interactions give you opportunities to make Polish friends?
5. In the Polish cultural environment, which aspects do you feel most in resonance with?

6. When misunderstandings or conflicts arise due to cultural differences, how do you usually deal with them?
7. What has been the greatest challenge for you while living in Poland?
8. Could you share an enjoyable experience of daily interaction with Polish people?

B. Work Experience in Sino-Polish Workplaces

1. What were your first impressions of the Sino-Polish workplace?
2. How long have you been working with your Polish colleagues?
3. Do your daily conversations with colleagues also include personal or life-related topics?
4. Do you feel that such informal conversations help you build better relationships with Polish colleagues?
5. In what ways have cultural differences between China and Poland influenced your work?
6. Do you think Chinese and Polish employees behave more similarly or more differently? Could you give some examples?
7. What differences have you observed between Polish coworkers' work habits and Chinese ways of working?
8. How would you describe your daily interactions with Polish colleagues? Do these interactions make you feel comfortable or tense, and why?
9. What difficulties have you encountered when adapting to the Sino-Polish workplace, and how did you overcome them?

Theme 2: The Use of “Guanxi”

1. In your life and work in Poland, do you apply elements of Chinese relationship culture (such as *Mianzi* or *Renqing*) in your interactions? If so, how?
2. Do you think Polish society is also based on personal relationships? Do you see any similarities in interaction patterns?
3. In the workplace, do you and your colleagues take *Mianzi* into account?
4. Have you observed Polish colleagues trying to maintain collective honor or protect coworkers' face when dealing with clients or competitors?

5. How much *Xinren* exist in your coworker relationship with Polish colleagues?

Theme 3: Building Positive Coworker Relationships

A. Emotional Expression and Trust

1. In relationships with Polish colleagues, do you feel comfortable expressing your emotions, whether happiness or sadness?
2. When you have disagreements with Polish colleagues, do you prefer to address them directly or resolve them indirectly?
3. How would you describe the level of trust between you and your Polish colleagues when it comes to sharing resources and information?

B. Feedback, Growth, and Interaction Effects

1. How do you usually respond to your Polish colleagues' performance, whether positive or negative?
2. Have you ever experienced moments of inspiration while collaborating with Polish colleagues? How are ideas usually shared in the workplace?
3. How have your interactions with Polish colleagues influenced your own work habits? Could you give an example?
4. How often do you interact with Polish colleagues outside of work-related matters?

C. Interdependence and stability relationship

1. What measures have you taken to promote relationship in the Sino-Polish workplace?
2. Do you think your Polish colleagues could become valuable resources in the future? If so, in what ways do you think they might contribute?
3. What suggestions do you have for improving relationships with Polish colleagues? What strategies might you consider adopting?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), how would you rate your relationship with Polish colleagues? What is the reason for your rating?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences and insights with me today. Your perspectives are extremely valuable for this research, and they will greatly contribute to a deeper understanding of workplace interactions between Chinese and Polish employees.

I truly appreciate the time and thought you have devoted to this interview. Please rest assured that all information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

Once again, thank you for your kind participation.

Appendix 4: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Polish employees

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how Chinese and Polish employees work together in the workplace. I am particularly interested in exploring coworker relationships in the context of cultural integration between China and Poland.

As someone with valuable experience in Sino-Polish workplaces, your insights are highly valuable, and I would like to invite you to openly share your thoughts and feelings.

Before we begin, I would like to emphasize that this interview is conducted solely for research purposes. Your responses will remain strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone in your company. Neither your name nor your company's name will appear in any publications resulting from this research.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview (audio and video) to ensure accuracy in data collection.

Opening Questions

Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

How long have you been working with Chinese colleagues?

Theme 1: Differentiated Embedding in the Workplace

A. Initial Encounter and Cultural Experience

1. What led you to meet and work with Chinese colleagues for the first time?
2. What were your first impressions of the Sino-Polish workplace?
3. Do you participate in cultural activities or traditions with your Chinese colleagues or Chinese friends? If so, could you share some examples?
4. Do you think these interactions give you opportunities to make Polish friends?
5. When misunderstandings or conflicts arise due to cultural differences, how do you usually handle them?

6. Could you share an enjoyable experience of daily interaction with Chinese people?

B. Work Experience in Sino-Polish Workplaces

1. How do you typically interact with your Chinese colleagues in daily work? Are these interactions mostly work-related, or do they also include personal topics?
2. In your view, how do the work habits of Chinese colleagues differ from those of Polish colleagues? Are there also similarities?
3. Have your Chinese colleagues influenced your own behavior or work habits? Could you provide an example?
4. Do you think these interactions have helped you build friendships with Chinese colleagues?
5. Do you feel that your Polish cultural background affects the way you interact with Chinese colleagues? If so, in what ways?
6. Have you faced any difficulties adapting to the Sino-Polish workplace? How did you manage to overcome them?

Theme 2: Perceptions of Guanxi

1. In Chinese culture, there is the concept of “saving face,” meaning avoiding direct criticism to protect individual and group reputation, especially when dealing with clients or external partners. Have you noticed this approach among your Chinese colleagues?
2. Do you feel that your Chinese colleagues tend to handle issues indirectly to maintain team harmony? How does this communication style affect you and your work?
3. In Polish culture, is there a similar concept to “saving face” or maintaining others reputations? If so, could you share your experiences or views?
4. Do you feel comfortable expressing emotions, whether positive or negative, to your Chinese colleagues?
5. In your opinion, what aspects do Chinese colleagues prioritize when building and maintaining relationships (e.g., politeness, trust, warmth, personal closeness)? How does this differ from your usual approach?

Theme 3: Building Positive Coworker Relationships

A. Emotional Expression and Trust

1. In relationships with Chinese colleagues, do you feel comfortable expressing your emotions, whether happiness or sadness?
2. How would you describe the level of trust between you and your Chinese colleagues when it comes to sharing resources and information?
3. Now that you have worked with Chinese colleagues for some time, if differences of opinion arise, would you prefer to resolve them directly or indirectly?

B. Feedback, Growth, and Interaction Effects

1. How do you usually respond to your Chinese colleagues' performance, whether positive or negative?
2. Have you ever experienced moments of inspiration while collaborating with Chinese colleagues? How are ideas usually shared in the workplace?
3. How have your interactions with Chinese colleagues influenced your own work habits? Could you give an example?
4. How often do you interact with Chinese colleagues outside of work-related matters?

C. Interdependence and stability relationship

1. Do you think your Chinese colleagues could become valuable resources in the future? If so, in what ways do you think they might contribute?
2. What suggestions do you have for improving relationships with Chinese colleagues? What strategies might you consider adopting?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), how would you rate your relationship with Chinese colleagues? What is the reason for your rating?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences and insights with me today. Your perspectives are extremely valuable for this research, and they will greatly contribute to a deeper understanding of workplace interactions between Chinese and Polish employees.

I truly appreciate the time and thought you have devoted to this interview. Please rest assured that all information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

Once again, thank you for your kind participation.

Summary of the Thesis

This study examined the differentiated embedding process of Chinese self-initiated expatriates and Polish local employees in cross-cultural workplaces, with a particular focus on the moderating role of Guanxi in building positive coworker relationships. Given the limited attention in prior research to the mechanisms through which positive relationships develop in cross-cultural settings, and the lack of empirical evidence in the Sino-Polish context, this study offers meaningful theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions.

At the theoretical level, the study introduces the differentiated embedding model into the Sino-Polish workplace context, thereby extending the explanatory framework for cross-cultural relationship building. It also systematically applies attachment and belonging measures to this population and validates their effects on high-quality connections. By incorporating Guanxi as a cross-cultural moderating mechanism, the study further clarifies how Guanxi practices function, adapt, and vary in Sino-Polish workplaces, offering a new analytical lens for research on cross-cultural organizational behavior.

At the methodological level, the study adopts a convergent parallel mixed methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses and using triangulation to establish convergence and complementarity between findings. This approach enhances both the robustness and the explanatory depth of the results, while also providing a replicable pathway for future research on cross-cultural coworker relationships.

At the practical level, the study identifies differentiated mechanisms through which employees in Sino-Polish workplaces build relationships, develop trust, and manage conflict, generating concrete implications for cross-cultural management. Specifically, organizations can apply the dual adjustment strategy proposed in this research: supporting Chinese employees in adapting to Polish workplace culture while helping Polish employees understand and accommodate Chinese coworkers' communication preferences and cultural norms. By fostering both formal and informal opportunities for interaction, organizations can accelerate trust building, reduce cultural friction, and improve team

cohesion and performance.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence on the construction of positive relationships in Sino-Polish workplaces. It lays a theoretical and methodological foundation for future research on relational mechanisms in multicultural organizational contexts. The findings offer a fresh perspective on how individuals and organizations can collaborate effectively across cultural boundaries in the era of globalization, and they open new avenues for advancing cross-cultural management research.

Streszczenie rozprawy doktorskiej

Niniejsze badanie dotyczy procesu zróżnicowanego osadzenia (differentiated embedding) chińskich expatriantów z własnej inicjatywy oraz polskich pracowników lokalnych w międzykulturowych środowiskach pracy, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem moderującej roli Guanxi w budowaniu pozytywnych relacji między współpracownikami. Ze względu na ograniczoną uwagę poświęcaną w dotychczasowych badaniach mechanizmom kształtowania się pozytywnych relacji w kontekstach międzykulturowych, a także brak empirycznych analiz w kontekście chińsko-polskim, niniejsze badanie wnosi istotny wkład teoretyczny, metodologiczny i praktyczny.

Na poziomie teoretycznym badanie wprowadza model zróżnicowanego osadzenia (differentiated embedding) do kontekstu miejsca pracy chińsko-polskiego, rozszerzając tym samym ramy wyjaśniające proces budowania relacji międzykulturowych. Ponadto w sposób systematyczny zastosowano w tej populacji miary przywiązania i poczucia przynależności oraz zweryfikowano ich wpływ na powiązania wysokiej jakości (high-quality connections). Włączając Guanxi jako międzykulturowy mechanizm moderujący, badanie dodatkowo wyjaśnia, w jaki sposób praktyki Guanxi funkcjonują, adaptują się i różnicują w chińsko-polskich środowiskach pracy, oferując nową perspektywę analityczną dla badań nad międzykulturowymi zachowaniami organizacyjnymi.

Na poziomie metodologicznym badanie opiera się na schemacie konwergentnym równoległym metod mieszanych (convergent parallel mixed methods design), integrując analizy ilościowe i jakościowe oraz wykorzystując triangulację do wykazania zbieżności i komplementarności uzyskanych wyników. Podejście to wzmacnia zarówno rzetelność, jak i głębię wyjaśniającą rezultatów, a jednocześnie dostarcza replikowalnej ścieżki dla przyszłych badań nad międzykulturowymi relacjami współpracowniczymi.

Na poziomie praktycznym badanie identyfikuje zróżnicowane mechanizmy, za pomocą których pracownicy w chińsko-polskich środowiskach pracy budują relacje, rozwijają zaufanie i zarządzają konfliktem, dostarczając konkretnych implikacji dla zarządzania międzykulturowego. W szczególności organizacje mogą zastosować zaproponowaną w badaniu strategię podwójnego dostosowania: wspierać chińskich pracowników w adaptacji do polskiej kultury miejsca pracy, a jednocześnie pomagać polskim pracownikom w rozumieniu i uwzględnianiu preferencji komunikacyjnych oraz norm kulturowych chińskich współpracowników. Poprzez tworzenie zarówno formalnych, jak i nieformalnych okazji do interakcji organizacje mogą przyspieszać budowanie zaufania, ograniczać tarcia kulturowe oraz wzmacniać spójność i efektywność zespołów.

Podsumowując, niniejsze badanie dostarcza empirycznych dowodów dotyczących konstruowania pozytywnych relacji w chińsko-polskich środowiskach pracy. Tworzy ono teoretyczne i metodologiczne podstawy dla przyszłych badań nad mechanizmami relacyjnymi w wielokulturowych kontekstach organizacyjnych. Uzyskane wyniki

oferują nowe spojrzenie na to, w jaki sposób jednostki i organizacje mogą skutecznie współpracować ponad granicami kulturowymi w dobie globalizacji, a także otwierają nowe kierunki rozwoju badań nad zarządzaniem międzykulturowym.