



# Self-Initiated Expatriates - Disloyal Adventurers or Misunderstood Heroes?

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# Abstract

China is growing as an economic power leading to more and more foreign organizations taking the opportunity of its future potential and hence opening up their subsidies there. Companies nowadays, have several options when it comes to what type of workforce they should recruit. Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) are a growing group in the international workforce who goes to work in another country on their own initiative as compared to the traditional expatriates that are sent by companies. Our literature research indicated that SIEs are perceived as a group of people who lack organizational commitment and tend to switch jobs often, which makes organizations reluctant to employ and invest in them.

Inspired by this, we have performed a study, which investigated SIEs' experiences in China. The purpose of the study was to develop recommendations for organizations on how to better leverage SIEs as human resource. To fulfill the purpose of our thesis, we conducted a qualitative study, where we interviewed ten Westerners who currently had a job or previously had been employed in China. Our empirical findings revealed that SIEs perceive themselves as developing better cross-cultural skills and improving their language proficiency more than traditional expatriates as well as being much cheaper to employ. They do however need challenges, freedom and career development possibilities in order to stay satisfied. The failure to provide these from the company side results in them quitting their job or if the costs of quitting are too high, they stay on but performing only what they absolutely have to. As for the existing definitions, we found that a definition that only includes individuals with clear plans of return is not suitable since some SIEs have a "for now" mindset and only considering SIEs who intend to leave in the near future might lead to an overrepresentation of "failed" SIEs in the population. A more suitable definition should allow for less definite plans for staying in the host country.

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# 1 Introduction

*In this opening chapter, we will explain the reasons for studying this topic. Background section provides an overview of the research area in a larger context, namely an introduction to the concepts of assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates and why China is an interesting context for studying SIEs. This introduction will come down to the short overview of the theoretical framework, describing the research gap and problematization ending with our own reflections of the overall subject.*

## 1.1 Background

Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) have a reputation of being unpredictable in terms of their commitment to organizations (Doherty, 2013, p. 451; Inkson et al., 1997, p. 359). Their international relocations are seen as personal adventures motivated by ideas such as “seeing the world” and “try something different” (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352). This seems to have made some companies reluctant to hire, train and in other ways invest in SIEs (Doherty, 2013, p. 452; Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 28; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). However, SIEs have been found to possess strong cross-cultural skills and knowledge about local environments that could be very valuable to organizations (Peltokorpi, 2008, p. 1602; Tharenou, 2013, p. 350). The combination of having both host country and international business competencies make SIEs a unique low cost alternative on the labor market (Tharenou, 2013, p. 350).

Expatriate management has been a popular field of study over the last few decades (Cooke, 2009, pp. 13-14; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999, p. 783; Inkson et al., 1997, p. 353). Much has been done to develop knowledge regarding for example adjustment and satisfaction of professionals who are sent by their organizations on international assignments (e.g. Selmer, 2001; Naumann, 1993). This traditional form of expatriation has been widely used by multinational corporations and has been a focus of research for a long time. The term assigned expatriates (AEs) for this type of expatriate have in recent years gained in popularity (e.g. Andresen et al., 2014; Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008). Organizations often have to provide substantial benefits and relatively high salaries to get potential AEs to accept the international assignment (Konopaske & Werner, 2005, pp. 1170, 1173). AEs are also highly concerned with career implications of accepting or rejecting international assignments (Doherty et al., 2011, p. 607; Pinto et al., 2012; p. 2309). Extrinsic reasons such as CV building, higher pay, better lifestyle indicate that the individual's desire to adapt and learn about the new culture and environment can be considered to be rather low (Osland, 2001, pp.155-156). Adjustment issues have indeed been found to be an issue for AEs (Selmer 2002, p. 47; Yeaton & Hall, 2008, pp. 75-76) which will be discussed in theory chapter more in detail.

## 1.2 Self-initiated Expatriates

The traditional expatriates are not the only mobile professionals working abroad. In the global economy of today an increasingly common type of expat is the self-initiated expat (SIE) (Inkson et al., 1997 pp. 352-353; Suutari & Brewster, 2000, pp. 417-418). These individuals differ from assigned expatriates as they seek out international assignments on

their own initiative instead of being assigned to them by their organization. This can be due to many reasons such as limited career possibilities in the home country and high interest towards internationalization or host country location (Doherty et al., 2011, pp. 607-608; Richardson & Mallon, 2005, pp. 416-417). Furthermore, the jobs taken are not necessarily in a home company's subsidiary as in the case of expatriate assignment, but can also be in a host country organization or some other foreign international organizations (Suutari & Brewster, 2000, p. 419). Another differentiating factor is the funding, as the self-initiated expatriates finance their travel, accommodation and other expenses by themselves instead of receiving a big compensation package from the headquarters (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352).

SIEs are estimated to make up a significant part of the international workforce (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008, pp. 989-990) and have even been claimed to be more common than traditional expatriates (Myers and Pringle 2005, p. 421). This makes it surprising that self-initiated expatriates as opposed to the traditional assigned expatriates have received much less attention in the literature over the years and is still relatively under-researched (Andresen & Biemann, 2010, p. 441; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2012, p. 1964; Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352; Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari, 2008, p. 979; McKenna & Richardson, 2007, p. 307; Selmer & Luring, 2011a, p. 2056). Inkson et al. (1997, pp. 352-353) claimed that careers are becoming increasingly boundaryless and filled with temporary assignments, putting emphasis on individuals building up their personal skills and working for multiple companies during their lifetime rather than climbing up the hierarchy ladder of a specific company. Self-initiated expatriate experiences provide the individual with more flexibility and leverage when it comes to their career development compared to the traditional company assigned expatriates. SIE experiences are also more easily available for younger people in the beginning of their careers as traditional expat assignments are often reserved for more senior professionals in a company (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 990).

### **1.3 China as an Expat Destination**

With a population of 1.3 billion people, i.e. one-fifth of the world's population, China has become one of the most desirable markets after opening up for foreign investments in 1979 (Selmer, 2006, p. 2010). It is currently the second largest economy in the world but with the last three decade's average growth rate of 9.5%, it is likely to catch up with the United States in twenty years (Fu & Deshpande, 2011, p. 301). This rapid economic growth has led to a vast number of foreign companies of all sizes starting up operations in Southeast Asia and sending their employees to help out in building new units (Siu et al., 2002, pp. 610-611). Mainland China has become especially popular destination for big Western European and American corporations (Selmer, 2001, p.7). This indicates that there is an increasing number of so called expatriates, individuals who temporarily relocate themselves from the home base to an international location for doing business, as defined by Lee & Donohue (2012, p. 1198). In HSBC's (2013) Expat Explorer survey, China was ranked as the most popular expat destination based on answers from over 7,000 expats relating to their economic situation, quality of life and what it's like to raise children abroad. However, due to a very distinctive culture and the way of living in comparison with the Western lifestyle,

China is quite a challenging environment for conducting expatriate assignments (Selmer, 2005, p. 68-69; Selmer, 2006b, p. 1210).

#### **1.4 Pros and Cons of Assigned Expatriates and Self- Initiated Expatriates**

When a multinational enterprise is recruiting its workforce, there are several alternatives to be considered when deciding what type of an employee to hire. Wang et al. (2009, p. 1201) found that the use of expatriates in foreign subsidiaries could increase knowledge transfer to the subsidiary and thereby lead to improved performance, provided that the expatriates had the motivation and adaptability necessary to facilitate knowledge transfer. Gamble (2000, pp. 898-900) also argued for the potential of expatriates to secure substantial strategic advantages for companies in China and elsewhere. However, AEs have been associated with high failure rates (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 22; Yeaton & Hall, 2008, pp. 75-76). Common problems companies experience when using AEs in China are similar to what has been reported at other locations (Lee, 2007, pp. 410-411; Malek & Budhwar, 2013, p. 227-228), that some have difficulties adapting to the Chinese environment, they seldom know the language, some lack knowledge about the social culture and there is risk of cross-cultural misunderstandings (Kühlmann & Hutchings 2010, p. 28). Selmer (2005, p. 79), among others, has argued that since much of the negative outcomes for expatriates in international joint ventures in China seemed to come from cross-cultural aspects, an alternative selection strategy could be applied where previous positive work experience from the host-country and thus cross-cultural skill is valued higher.

SIEs have been found to adjust better to local social environments ( Froese, 2012, p. 1108; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2009, p. 1107; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2012, p. 1964) giving them a potential edge over AEs as this has been identified as a major concern. Adjustment to the local environment has been found to affect performance and success of expatriates (Lee, 2007, pp. 410-411; Malek & Budhwar, 2013, p. 227-228). Self-initiated expatriates are in general also much less expensive for companies than traditional expatriates who often require a multitude of benefits, bonuses and support to accept and become successful in their international assignment (Konopaske & Werner, 2005, pp. 1170, 1173). SIEs on the contrary do not need convincing to accept a job abroad as they are actively seeking them by themselves. In light of this, one might ask why multinational corporations are still sending traditional expatriates when there are so many SIEs willing to accept the challenge at a much lower cost.

However, compared to AEs, SIEs have little or no previous history with the company and they might not be as familiar with the company values and organizational culture as would an internally assigned expatriate. In a study by Kühlmann and Hutchings (2010, p. 29), perceived lack of company-specific business skills and commitment to the parent company was cited as reasons for not hiring local foreign managers (a group that also can be defined as SIEs) to subsidiaries in China. Another study has also questioned the assumption that SIEs develop career capital during their experiences abroad. Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) found that SIEs in Qatar could also experience career capital stagnation.

Despite the identified weaknesses of AEs and support for localizing staff in some of the previous literature, companies still rely quite heavily on assigned expatriates as managers in their Chinese operations (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, pp. 29-30). Companies still prefer to keep some certain key positions such as managing directors and financial managers for control reasons, like the risk of self-serving behavior among Chinese managers (cf. Beaudoin et al., 2012, p. 153), but expectations of international clients to be able to communicate with expatriates on the higher levels of management, can also be a factor (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 30).

Kühlmann and Hutchings (2010, p. 30) found that the majority of companies in their study expressed intentions to in the near future replace expatriates (AEs) with either Chinese managers or locally hired foreign managers. This suggests that companies have begun to consider localization as a necessary eventual step in their staffing strategies in China. SIEs can have much to offer MNCs in terms of cross-cultural skills, local networks and cost benefits (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013, p.1965) and therefore we argue that they should be an important resource to consider for localization strategies in China. Suutari and Brewster (2000, p. 435) argued that SIEs could represent a rich source of labor to multinational corporations (MNCs) that could be used more effectively to reduce costs if they were to be included in companies' internationalization strategies. To fully capitalize on this resource it is important to understand and help SIEs overcome the problems that companies associate with them.

## **1.5 Research Gap**

SIEs have been found to have different motivations and characteristics from AEs (Andresen & Biemann, 2010, p. 443; Suutari & Brewster, 2000, p. 429). These differences make it clear that SIEs are important to study as a group of its own and it cannot be assumed that what applies to AEs will automatically apply to SIEs as well. Our literature review indicates that from the very early stages of the research about SIEs, there is a concern related to SIEs and their willingness to remain working for one organization (Cao et al., 2013, p. 57; Inkson et al., 1997, pp. 364-366; Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010; Richardson & Mallon, 2005, p.211; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). One of the early studies brings up that the reason for the attachment to the organization being low is the fact that accepted job assignments are seen as temporary since the main purpose for traveling abroad is to experience the culture and feeding the hunger for adventures (Inkson et al., 1997, pp. 358-359). The same authors further state that the job in the host country is by some taken as a means for surviving until the traveler heads back home.

Another reason for an increasing turnover rate and a weak attachment between the employer and employee in general is that boundaryless careers are becoming increasingly more predominant (Stahl et al., 2002, p.224). Boundaryless career according to Arthur and Rousseau (1996, p. 6) means having an independent career identity, separated from the employer, where the individual is in charge of his/her own career development. The emphasis is on acquiring up-to-date skills and crossing between organizations that can provide the most meaningful work at the time being (DeFilippi & Arthus, 1994, p. 318). In addition, the individual focuses on building an own network of contacts (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6; DeFilippi & Arthus, 1994, p. 320). SIEs have been associated with

boundaryless career attitudes (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, p. 297; Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352) and low commitment (Andresen, Biemann & Pattie, 2012, p. 11; Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 29).

Despite these indications of commitment and boundaryless career attitudes being an issue for employers of SIEs, few studies have investigated the organizational commitment and career attitudes of this group, especially in the Chinese context. Cooke (2009, pp. 14-15) identified that a significant amount of research on expatriate management in the Chinese context has been focused on adjustment issues but that other aspects have been neglected. Furthermore, previous research has identified a need to investigate how locally hired foreign managers in China themselves view the problems they encounter and what needs they have in terms of training and development (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 34). Cao et al. (2014) found that perceived organizational support was effective for facilitating SIEs' satisfaction in the host country and argued that SIEs can pursue satisfying careers within organizations.

We are also curious about SIEs' career capital development, i.e. the development of their skills, motivations and network (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 981) in China due to a prior study by Rodriguez and Scurry (2013, p. 204) showing that the SIEs' perceived their career capital in the Middle East to be stagnating. We find it interesting to see if the same is applicable for SIEs in China as well. Since SIEs tend to see their international experiences as a way to develop or fulfill a personal agenda (Lo et al., 2012, pp. 4215-4216), the way SIEs in China perceive their career capital development within an organization could affect their commitment to that organization. Therefore we argue that there is a research gap represented by a lack of understanding of the organizational commitment and career capital development of SIEs in China and how companies can better retain and benefit from this resource.

## **1.6 Research Question and Purpose of the Study**

SIEs are perceived by companies as having limited organizational commitment which seems to be attributed to their boundaryless career attitudes and therefore it is of our interest to examine this topic in more detail. The literature review indicates that there is a lack of understanding of SIEs' experiences and career capital development in China in particular. On one hand research suggests that SIE experiences are very developing for the individual who builds career capital and gains positive future career effects. On the other hand, research has recognized the importance of context on SIE experiences where for example localization policies and host-country national favoritism can cause career capital stagnation for SIEs. It has been suggested that some foreign companies in China see SIEs as temporary workers only and do not offer them much career development support or training. We have thus formulated the research question of the study to be as follows:

*How can organizations increase SIEs' organizational commitment and benefit from their acquired career capital in China?*

An important obstacle identified in previous research to organizations hiring SIEs is the perception of them having low organizational commitment. Thus, an important aspect of

how organizations can benefit from SIEs as a human resource in China is their ability to retain this resource and keep SIEs motivated. We therefore intend to examine how organizations can improve SIEs organizational commitment in China. We also intend to examine how SIEs in China can provide benefits to an organization. Previous research is inconclusive regarding SIEs career capital development and it has been suggested that different national contexts can be of importance. We argue that China presents a unique cultural and national context where we need clarification about how SIEs can actually contribute to the competitive advantage of organizations.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop recommendations for organizations in China on how to better leverage and retain SIEs as a human resource in China. This will be useful for companies currently employing SIEs in China or for those who consider doing so. The knowledge can assist companies in formulating HR strategies, incentive programs and career development support in their Chinese operations.

## **1.7 Choice of Topic**

The authors of this thesis are two students studying the International Business program with specialization in Management during the fourth and final year. We have chosen our topic to be about expatriates and self-initiated expatriates as we are both interested in building an international career or working for a company abroad. Hence, the in-depth scrutiny of this particular area by first reviewing the existing literature and then performing a study of our own, provides us with more understanding from two perspectives. First, about what we, as individuals, can expect the major challenges to be in terms of getting hired and second, what the companies' expectations and general policies are when it comes to handling self-initiated expatriates. Especially, after reading the previous research, we felt that as there is a current lack of information in regards to self-initiated expatriates and that this field would be interesting to examine. This acquired knowledge about expatriation would further contribute to our own choice and behavior when applying for jobs abroad and will also be beneficial while working. Having China as the choice of country seemed a suitable idea as an increasing number of these expatriate assignments take place in China and it is an economically growing location. Furthermore, one of us, Johan Lidström, had already spent some years working in China as a self-initiated expatriate and therefore had some knowledge and firsthand experience of the topic.

## **1.8 Definitions**

In this paper, the following definitions are given to describe the terminology that we find relevant to the reader to consider.

### *(AE) Assigned Expatriate*

A person who is sent by the home organization for a temporary assignment in a foreign country

### *Boundaryless Career*

Career that differs from the traditional hierarchical organizational career in the sense that the employee is not "bounded" to one single employer but rather the career comprises

several assignments across different organizations. In addition, the individual him/herself is the one ultimately responsible for the career development.

### *Career Capital*

Set of capabilities that managers develop during their international assignments and are generally divided into three parts: knowing-how, knowing-why and knowing-whom.

#### *Knowing-how*

A part of career capital (see definition above); refers to all the relevant explicit and implicit skills competences and knowledge that are related to the job.

#### *Knowing-why*

A part of career capital (see definition above); refers to personal motivations, beliefs and meanings that determine the reasons for an employee to pursue a certain career path.

#### *Knowing-whom*

A part of career capital (see definition above); refers to individuals network both intra-organization and inter-organizational contexts. It consists of colleagues, managers, peers and fellow alumni, just to mention a few.

### *(MNC) Multinational Corporation*

A company that owns or controls production or service facilities in more than one country.

### *(OC) Organizational Commitment*

Our definition borrows that of Allen & Meyer (1990, pp. 2-3) and thus the term consists of three different components as follows: affective commitment (AC) regards a person's *emotional links* to an organization, continuance commitment (CC) regards *costs* involved in leaving the organization and normative commitments (NC) regards a person's perceived *obligation* to stay with the organization

### *Protean Career*

Describes a flexible career that is driven by an individual and their values. The emphasis is on achieving a subjective success and the sense of self-fulfillment.

### *(SIE) Self-Initiated Expatriate*

Individuals who find a job in a foreign country by themselves without any attachments to a home organization in contrast to traditional company sent expatriates.

## 2 Methodology

*The methodology chapter is divided into two main parts, the first part briefly introducing the scientific approach that our study adopts and the second part presenting the more practical approach. The scientific approach thus starts with acknowledging our preconceptions as researchers followed by ontological and epistemological assumptions. The practical method, in turn, consists of sections covering research strategy and design, literature search & source criticism, research quality criteria and the practical data collection method. The chapter also touches upon the ethical considerations.*

### 2.1 Scientific Approach/Research Philosophy

*It is important to make it clear to the reader on what theoretical and philosophical assumptions a study is based. This to allow the reader to gain an understanding of the choices we have made in terms of what to study, why and how we study it as well as what sort of outcomes can be expected.*

#### 2.1.1 Social Preconceptions

When writing a thesis, it is important not to let one's own preconceptions to unduly affect the process at any point of time. Preconceptions as a term refers to the researcher's prior experience both in professional and personal context, beliefs about the nature of things that are to be investigated, motivations and interests for conducting the study as well as the previously gathered theoretical knowledge within the field (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). As mentioned in the introduction chapter, one of us has prior experience of working in China as a self-initiated expatriate and thus it is especially crucial to be aware of how these personal values, beliefs or feelings, could have an impact on the research and to keep any preconceptions separate when analyzing any material to the extent it is possible (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 29-30). Having this experience and knowledge about Chinese culture and language can be seen as a strength but also a weakness as the picture of the chosen topic can easily become biased. A significant risk that may be especially relevant in our research is that some researchers have been found to be very sympathetic to underdog groups (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 30). SIEs can be seen as an underdog group who we view in a positive light and are handled in an unfair manner by many companies when it comes to employing them in China. This kind of behavior was experienced by Lumsden (2013, pp. 14-16) and Malterud (2001, p. 484) who furthermore argued that value neutrality is a myth and perhaps even impossible to attain in qualitative research. However, as we are two researchers and the other person has not been in the similar situation, this individual can possibly detect and to some extent balance out the influences of personal experiences. Our goal has been to present an as unbiased view as possible while we recognize that our personal values and experiences have inevitably influenced our work to some extent. However, being aware of the potential sources of influences has helped us to minimize the effects of our social preconceptions.



### **2.1.2 Theoretical Preconceptions**

Being a student of Business Administration and Economics for four years has inevitably formed our understanding of multiple different disciplines within the above mentioned subjects, especially in the field of Management as it has been our area of specialization. We have thus been briefly introduced to the majority of the theoretical concepts used in this thesis already before even though the connection to SIEs is something totally new. The theoretical linkage between the two subjects has, however, been developed through academic journals, which have also complemented our existing knowledge. Furthermore, throughout our university studies we have learned what is regarded as acceptable knowledge and how information should be gathered. Our own capabilities, skills and strengths in regards to that, may however have an influence on the chosen research methods and design.

We are aware of the fact that no research is ever completely value-free and that the chosen theoretical framework along with our pre-conceptions will inevitably have some sort of effect on the final discussion and conclusion of the thesis. The crucial factor is to keep an open mind and be self-reflective throughout the entire process. It is imperative to realize that the preconceptions do not only have an impact on how the things and events are seen but also what is seen (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 29).

### **2.1.3 Ontological Assumptions**

Ontology is associated with the nature of the reality; held assumptions about how the external world operates and how it is constructed. On one side of the scale, often referred to as objectivism, the reality is external to the individual, while on the other, subjectivism suggests that it is a social phenomenon or an outcome of individuals' social construction (Long et al., 2000, p. 190; Saunders et al., 2009, p.110). In this thesis, a subjectivist view is adopted as we believe that the external world as we see it is built on social interaction and in a continuous change as it is an outcome of each individual's own perceptions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 111). Geertz (1973, p. 5) said of culture and man that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun". We believe this quote is not only a fitting description of culture but of social reality as a whole.

When it comes to the research purpose, to develop recommendations for organizations in China on how to better leverage and retain SIEs as a human resource in China, the subjectivist view is suitable as the individual's understanding of the development of their career capital and attitudes towards commitment rely on different interpretations by social actors and thus there is no pre-built reality that could be observed objectively. On the contrary, it follows the notion that the organization and its culture and norms are rather in a constant state of revision. The individuals, when interacting with the environment, are simultaneously constructing their own understandings and interpretations of the occurring events and acting according to their subjective interpretations of what is accepted to be normal in that specific situation (Saunders et al., 2009 p. 111). Additionally, we believe that the perceived career capital development in a similar manner is an outcome of a subjective interpretation.

#### 2.1.4 Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemological assumptions refer to what can be considered as acceptable knowledge within a particular discipline and how this knowledge can be transmitted to others (Long et al., 2000, p. 190; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 112). In other words, it follows the discussion about in which conditions the social world can be studied and whether or not the same principles used for studying nature science can be used in that context (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15). According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 113), there are three main epistemological approaches, namely positivism, realism and interpretivism. The interpretivist view holds that the social world should be investigated through humans and their interpretations of the phenomenon at hand since the social reality has a meaning to humans and humans act according to how they attribute the actions of others (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 16-18; Patton, 2002, pp. 267-268).

Our epistemological assumptions can be considered to be in line with interpretivism. Geertz (1973, p. 5) argued that culture is something man himself has created and that the analysis of culture therefore should be an interpretive science in search of meaning rather than an experimental science in search of law. We agree with the interpretivist view that studies on social phenomena need to consider human beings differently from objects because these phenomena have meaning to those who experience them and the meaning will influence how they act (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 17-18). To fully understand the meanings of social actions we believe it is necessary to take the social actors perspective in interpreting their social reality and how they act within it.

Based on these arguments we have rejected the epistemological positions of positivism and realism in this thesis. The former relies heavily on the scientific approach similar of a natural scientist that aims at gathering facts, testing and confirming hypothesis and producing generalizations (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 15; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 113) while the latter has a strong emphasis on the belief of an external reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.17). Hence, these two doctrines differ to our opinions about how knowledge should be acquired and handled.

## 2.2 Practical Method

*In the practical method section, a detailed description of the adopted research approach and data collection method is provided; that is, how a qualitative study in form of interviews is performed. Furthermore, an overview of constructing the interview guide is given. In addition, literature research and quality criteria will address the legitimacy of the study ending with a discussion about ethical considerations.*

### 2.2.1 Research Strategy

Appropriate research strategy is derived from ontological and epistemological considerations and research approach and generally divided into quantitative and qualitative clusters according to the data types used (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 26-27; Hyde, 2000, p. 84). The employed method should also be chosen in line with the research question and its purpose (Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 138-139). Scholars practicing the quantitative method are concerned with shaping generalizations of large populations which may lead to details

being ignored. After selecting a representative sample, the behavior of these individuals is measured and the acquired results are then worked out to form generalizable characteristics of all the individuals having similar features to them in the chosen population (Hyde, 2000, p.84). The qualitative strategy, on the contrary, is practiced when the purpose is to scrutinize a phenomenon more in depth and the attempt is to enhance the understandings and insights of it (Shank, 2006, p. 347).

Our decision is to use the qualitative method for several reasons. First of all, as our research question is formulated in the way that the expected answers are to provide us more of an understanding of the chosen phenomenon, the intention was to capture the underlying motivations and thoughts of the SIEs located abroad. This is a product of our ontological and epistemological standpoints. Since we believe that social reality is created by social actors and in a constant state of revision and that gaining understanding of these realities requires taking the social actors perspective, the qualitative method is better suited for our research. We need to get deeper into the minds of our participants than a quantitative survey would allow. Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative research in this field as most of the prior scholars have focused on performing quantitative studies and thus we argue that the results of our study would contribute to the currently existing knowledge.

An alternative choice could have been to utilize a so-called mixed method approach and combine the quantitative and qualitative technique. The quantitative technique would then help to answer whether SIEs actually have low organizational commitment or not and which aspects of OC are most affected. We have not found any research that actually answers these questions but it seems to be a common perception among companies employing SIEs that they have low commitment (Kühlmann & Hutchings 2010, p. 29; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). Having this basis would help us in developing the interview questions and guide us towards the direction that seems to be the most relevant as the interviews could work as a follow-up to confirm the quantitative results. Moreover, the use of quantitative techniques such as a questionnaire would help us to quickly gather some basic information about the interviewee that is not directly observable (e.g. interviewees' background) (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 636). However, we have chosen to exclude the questionnaire as we are afraid that the time pressure would not allow us to design and conduct it in an appropriate way and further analyzing the huge amount of data would take too much of our effort. Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 644) argue that since all research projects have limited resources, conducting mixed methods research means that these resources would have to be more spread which means that the research effort in different areas may become too diluted. Instead, in order to better analyze the organizational commitment of the participants, we have decided to include 24 control questions along with the interviews. This is just to get some additional support for the spoken words and allow for easier comparison between the participants.

### **2.2.2 Research Approach & Design**

According to Hyde (2000, p. 83), there are two main research approaches when describing the relationship between theory and data, namely inductive and deductive reasoning. This thesis is going to adapt the deductive approach, which entails utilizing the theory as a springboard for a more in depth empirical examination, as opposed to inductive reasoning,

which focuses on building theories and producing generalizations from observations. The deductive approach has its origins in natural sciences but is frequently implemented in the context of social science as well (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 126). The deductive approach matches our decision to use the existing theories as a ground for our paper in order to first understand phenomena that we believe are related to our study and then with this knowledge in mind, apply them in a new context when conducting the empirical research. This method enables us to see not only the contributions of prior research but also formulate a more desirable data collection method. Furthermore, the findings of our study are not aimed at generating entirely new theories but rather examining existing theories' applicability and validity in the situation of SIEs in China. When it comes to research design, the idea is to make a cross-sectional study, which implies that we are interested this phenomenon at a certain point in time and thus our time horizon can be defined as a "snapshot" perspective (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 155)

### 2.2.3 Literature Search

According to Mogalakwe (2006, p. 221), documentary research method refers to the utilization of documentary sources. It describes techniques used to "[...] *categorize, investigate, interpret and identify the limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents, whether in the private or public domain [...]*" (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 60). When doing our literature search we have mainly focused on peer reviewed articles in academic journals. The EBSCO database is a very comprehensive source for reliable information (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 104) and has been our main tool for searching for articles. We have also used the database of Emerald, which is a global publisher of academic journals with more than 290 journals in their portfolio (Emerald, 2014). On top of that, Google Scholar has facilitated book reviewing processes and provided a quick access to otherwise hard copy versions. To avoid missing important previous contributions to our area of research we have used a wide range of keywords when performing our search. Due to the developments of the topic over the years some of the terminology used has changed a number of times which was important to take into consideration. For example, overseas experience later became self-initiated foreign work experience and now the term self-initiated expatriates is the most widely used.

Keywords used: Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), self-initiated foreign experience (SIFE/SFE), organizational commitment, overseas experience, boundaryless career, protean career, job embeddedness, China, career capital.

Besides utilizing the database search, we have screened the reference lists of some of the most relevant articles, which have led us to discover more field-related literature. This has also allowed us to identify the pioneering and most influential articles on this topic. Furthermore we have followed up the citations in the text in order to find the original source whenever possible as to be sure that the interpretations are not angled. Due to a few sources not being available at the Umeå university library or its databases, we have, however, made a couple of cited in references.

### 2.2.3.1 Source Criticism

When writing this thesis, both primary and secondary sources have been utilized since we have conducted interviews on our own but also relied on the material produced by others. When it comes to the secondary data, it is important that the documentary sources are handled scientifically (Mogalakwe, 2006, p. 224). To help in assessing the collected material, a commonly accepted source quality criteria developed by Scott (1990, p. 1-2) has been used. It consists of four components: authenticity, credibility, meaning and representativeness.

Authenticity is the fundamental criterion for source quality and refers to the reliability of the source, i.e. is the source genuine and of a dependable origin (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2011, p. 168; Mogalakwe, 2006, p. 225). We have critically reviewed all information gathered and as mentioned already, mainly used peer reviewed articles since they have been subject of thorough critical evaluation by experts within the specific research field. Additionally, the number of citations has been used as an indicator of the dependability, importance and general acceptance of sources. Apart from using peer reviewed material, the introduction chapter as well as this method chapter includes some books and website sources. Nevertheless, the extent to which they are used is very limited and the arguments presented are almost always backed up by some peer reviewed articles. Alternatively, they have been used only as a means to provide a more vivid illustration about the topic's actuality as in the case of introduction chapter. When citing non-peer reviewed sources we have been extra careful to assess the presented theories and made sure that the arguments are logical and that supportive information is found elsewhere. This is to make sure that the data is and not produced on the behalf of someone else and thus expressed with a bias. This also mirrors the credibility criterion which is fulfilled when the data includes no errors or distortions meaning that the content is sincere and accurate (Mogalakwe, 2006, p. 226).

Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2011, p. 167-168) use the concept of independency, by which they mean the trustworthiness of the source. In this paper, we have tried as far as possible to use the original source to avoid distorted meanings. However, as mentioned earlier, a couple of sources were not available at our university and we chose to do second hand references in those three cases. We have also been careful to assess previous research results in terms of their representativeness. When the evidence is typical of its kind, or if the extent to which it is untypical is known, it can be considered representative (Mogalakwe, 2006, p. 227).

The criteria of meaning concerns how clear and comprehensible evidence is (Mogalakwe, 2006, p. 227). As the purpose of reviewing a research article presumably is to gain an understanding of the meaning and significance of what is said, it is important that this is clear and comprehensible to the reader (Scott, 1990, p. 28). An article can have a literal meaning or a *face value*, e.g. a statistic and an interpreted meaning, i.e. a meaning put into context (Scott, 1990, p. 28). Although, much of the previous research we have reviewed is of a quantitative nature and has a *face value*, it also contains interpretative meaning. In practice, this implies that it is our duty to be critical and keep in mind that all secondary material, such as articles, always contains an interpretative part as the empirical findings have been subjectively analyzed and possibly influenced by personal preconceptions. Furthermore, the same results can have a different meaning when presented in another

context. Scott (1990, p. 28) states that the pieces of information make sense only when given the theoretical frame of reference. Moreover, we have paid attention to the date of publication as to avoid utilizing very old research findings if they seem to be old-fashioned in the light of current research. New publications replace the older ones all the time and more up-to-date information may provide completely new insights of what has been previously taken for granted.

#### 2.2.4 Research Quality

To ensure a high level of quality of our research we have strived to fulfill the trustworthiness criteria - credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability - of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). These criteria differ from those used for quantitative research mainly because the quantitative criteria take for granted that there can be a single absolute truth when studying a social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 395). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 251) argued that positivist criteria are inappropriate for evaluating research based on constructivist assumptions. Since we hold a subjectivist view of the world and believe that social phenomena, e.g. lack of commitment of self-initiated expatriates, are created through social interaction between actors, we argue that the trustworthiness criteria are well suited for evaluating our qualitative research. The criteria and the different techniques we have applied to ensure the quality of our thesis are discussed below.

##### 2.2.4.1 Trustworthiness

To ensure *credibility* we have used the technique of respondent validation or member checks that Lincoln and Guba argued for as a very important technique to achieve this (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Our respondent validation was done by giving all the respondents the opportunity to confirm whether we had correctly interpreted their statements and views of their social reality. We received respondent validation from all ten of our participants and their feedback helped us correct some minor misunderstandings. Mero-Jaffe (2011, p. 244) found that empowering participants in this way can contribute to trust between them and the researcher. Credibility can also be improved by prolonged engagement, meaning that enough time should be spent with the research object to be able to learn the culture, to build trust and to be able to test for misinformation introduced by distortions by the researcher or the respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301-303). Although the only “prolonged” engagement in this study was the total time spent interviewing self-initiated expatriates on location in China, we would argue that the fact that one of the authors of this thesis, Johan Lidström, spent four years living and working in China and thereby has a previous understanding of some aspects of the SIE culture, gives us a small head start in this regard. Although some years have passed we believe that a previous understanding and experience of the culture also can help us gain the trust of our respondents as well as enable us to better detect misinformation.

On the other hand Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 303-304) warns that such an experience presents a risk of overidentifying with the group being studied and that the researcher may “go native” i.e. become so accepted by and appreciative of the studied culture that it influences his or hers professional judgments. However, while they argue that there is no way to safeguard against such bias completely, they also state that awareness is a great step

towards preventing it. Therefore we have taken great care to reflect upon this risk and our preconceptions regarding the research topic.

As qualitative research is concerned with depth of data, the criteria of *transferability* is dependent on how rich and detailed descriptions are provided about the studied phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398; Guba, 1985, p. 316; Malterud, 2001, pp. 484-485). Therefore we have strived to produce “thick description”, as described by Geertz (1973, pp. 6, 27), of the observed phenomenon based on our gathered data. Thick description means interpreting human actions in their social context and taking into account not only words but also how they can be understood in the cultural settings and what kind of meaning they may have in a personal level (Geertz, 1973, p. 27). This indicates that in order to provide a thick description of data, it is important to look deeper than the surface and interpret the symbolic, socially and culturally embedded meanings of what is evident otherwise. We believe this can be achieved by extracting and analyzing spoken words in relation to their context which we argue requires a degree of immersion by the researcher in the world of the participants to be able to understand the social and cultural settings relevant to their stories.

To live up to Guba and Lincoln’s (1985, pp. 299, 316-318) criteria of dependability we have tried to be as transparent as possible with how our thesis work has been conducted indicating that both the interview guides as well as the control questions are presented in their entirety in this thesis so that the acceptability of our inquiry process can be reviewed by our supervisors. *Confirmability* depends on whether the researchers can be said to have acted in good faith and not let personal values knowingly influence the study or its results (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 398). The confirmability criterion according to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300), puts the focus of objectivity on the data rather than on the investigator. By being open about our personal values and preconceptions and striving to minimize their influence in our research as well as providing our raw data for scrutiny we hope to improve the confirmability of the results presented in this thesis.

#### 2.2.4.2 Other Quality Criteria

In addition to the trustworthiness criteria that are modifications of the conventional criteria based on positivist assumptions, Guba and Lincoln (1989, pp. 73-84) argued for using five authenticity criteria to evaluate qualitative research. The criteria of fairness, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity puts emphasis on how the research helps the studied members understand and do something to change their situation for the better. These criteria have not been very influential and are considered a bit controversial (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 399). However, we found some of them appealing from an ethical perspective as they promote a wider societal impact of the research. For example, the *ontological authenticity* criterion refers to the degree to which the respondents gain a better understanding of their social environment as a result of their participation and *educative authenticity* refers to enhancing respondents understanding and appreciation of perceptions of other stakeholder groups (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248). Although we consider these to be admirable goals, the techniques suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989, pp. 248-249) to throughout the study assist the respondents to look upon their own realities and experiences in more informed and sophisticated ways and obtaining testimony of this enhanced

understanding, would not be possible for us to apply due to the limited time we had with the respondents. We do still hope however that these goals will be fulfilled by our research as the results will in the end be shared with the respondents.

### 2.2.5 Sample

There are four wide categories when it comes to sampling procedures; probability, purpose/purposeful, convenience and mixed method (MM) method (Teddle & Yu, 2007, p. 77). The three latter methods could also be classified as being part of an umbrella term called non -probability sampling since purposeful, convenience and mixed method sampling conduct sampling without following the rules and procedures set for probability sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 190). Probability and purposeful sampling can be further divided into smaller and more specific sub-categories (Teddle & Yu, 2007, p. 78-79, 80). The applicability of each one of them depends on the purpose of the study, the type of data wanted, available resources and the interest and abilities of the researchers (Patton, 2002, p.272).

The rule of thumb, however, is that the probability-based sampling method is used in connection with quantitative inquiries as they aim at acquiring a large number of randomly selected respondents in order to make generalizations from that sample to be applicable for a bigger population (Patton, 2002, p. 273). According to Patton (2002, p. 273), the idea behind purposeful sampling is selecting information-rich cases i.e. the cases that the researcher can learn about the issues that are central to the purpose of the study. Furthermore, it differs from the probability-based random sampling in terms of its target being studying the cases more in-depth (Patton, 2002, p. 273). Convenience sample, in turn, occurs when the respondents to the sample are drawn due to the participants being easily accessible and willing to take part to the study (Teddle & Yu, 2007, p. 79). Finally, mixed method is defined as being a combination of probability and purposive sampling (Teddle & Yu, 2007, p. 87).

In this paper, purposeful sampling method was adopted since it enabled us to select respondents which we believed would hold the answers that would best correspond to our questions and thus contribute to our study. We also used snowball sampling as a more specific type of non -probability sampling and purposeful sampling. When carrying out this type of sampling, the researcher initially contacts a few people who possess characteristics relevant to the study at hand (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 192; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 271). In our study, we were looking for people who had gone to China on their own initiative, they had at least a bachelor's degree and they either had or were looking for a regular job in China. These criteria were based on the definition of the SIEs that will be discussed further on in the theoretical chapter. The researcher then exploits these contacts by utilizing the given information to identify and find more participants (Nyo, 2008, p. 330). We looked for participants to take part of our inquiry through social media, primarily Facebook of which we used for both leaving messages on different forums such as Swedish Young Professionals in Shanghai and contacting the potential individuals directly either through private message on Facebook or by sending an e-mail. We also knew some expatriates in China who, despite not belonging to the target group themselves, had some connections with people who matched our target group. From a couple of initial contacts, we generated



multiple leads that resulted in getting in touch with several other people that agreed to take part. Five participants were in the end found through snowball sampling while the other five were initial contacts. It should be also mentioned that after returning from China, we conducted one more interview through Skype due to the individual's eagerness to participate. However, we decided not to include it for two reasons. First of all, since it gave similar results as some of the previous interviews and did not provide any new unique perspective to our research, this could indicate that we have reached empirical saturation with our data. Second, as the interview was done over Skype, we did not feel that we could connect with the participant and gain the same richness of information as we had gained from the other participants.

The reason behind Facebook being the main tool for finding the appropriate sample derived from the notion of the members of the chosen population being "hard-to-reach" (Marpsat & Razafindratsima, 2010, p. 4). This definition by Marpsat and Razafindratsima (2010, p. 4) consists of several features of which the most applicable to our case were the notion of members of the population being hard to identify due to the lack of record and because the behavior of the population is unknown. There is no general, easily accessible record of SIEs in China as such nor did we know in which companies these people were located. That it can be difficult to identify and gain access to SIEs for academic research has also been recognized by other researchers (Doherty, 2013, p. 457). Baltar and Brunet (2012, p. 64-65) state that Facebook, can help in identifying the hard-to-reach population and expand sample size. The same authors further argue that this is thanks to the possibility for individuals to create and join groups of their interest and suggest them to others. Furthermore, the individual profile page enables the researcher to contact privately and hence minimize the impersonal contact and "spam" messaging that are frequently associated with low response rates in virtual data collection methods (Baltar & Brunet, 2012, p. 64-65). Indeed, the experience with Facebook was only positive. Besides reaching people through groups, one contact led to another and made the communication process fairly smooth as we were able to use the referrals as a means to form a more personal connection.

Even though this snowball sampling method proved to be highly beneficial for us, it, too, encompasses some drawbacks. The disadvantages with the above mentioned method is mainly concerned with generalizability of the study findings since the researcher relies on the contacted persons' social network and is dependent on this individual's willingness to share the information and thus a considerable amount of control is handed over the initial contact (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 193; Nyo, 2008, pp. 332, 335). However, since this is a qualitative study based on a subjectivist and interpretivist philosophy, generalizability is not the goal of our research.

Nyo (2008, p. 337) argues that another concern is the participant willingness. He means that it is not uncommon for participants to agree to take part of a study due to social pressure that they perceive within a particular social group. In the context of our inquiry, we were aware of this possibility and the negative outcomes and poor quality answers that it may have led to if someone uninterested would have been interviewed. However, we did not experience this to be a big concern.

### 2.2.6 Data Collection Method - Interviews

Interviews are a very common method in qualitative research and compared to interviews in quantitative research, qualitative interviewing is much less structured and the focus is more on the interviewee's point of view rather than the researcher's (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 465-466). Seidman (2013, p. 13) states that interviewing is a powerful method to gain insight in social issues and understand individuals' experiences. In a qualitative interview the respondent is encouraged to talk about what he or she deems important and the interviewer does not have to stick to the exact same questions for every respondent but can instead ask context specific follow-up questions to get a better understanding of the respondent's views of the issues at hand (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 466-467). The qualitative interviewer wants rich and detailed answers as opposed to answers that are straightforward to code and process (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467).

There are two major types of qualitative interviewing: unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). In an unstructured interview, the interviewer only has a few set questions and topics to cover and instead lets the interviewee answer freely and the interviewer follows up on interesting points raised by the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). Semi-structured interviews often make use of a so called interview guide, a list of questions within certain topics that will be covered, but the questions should be of an open nature and allow the interviewee great freedom in how to answer (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 320).

As part of the purpose of our study is to develop recommendations on how organization can increase organizational commitment of SIEs we argue that a flexible approach that focuses on what our interviewees consider important will give us the most interesting and valuable results. Since previous research has examined the views of organizations (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010) and investigated motivations and both personal and demographic characteristics of SIEs (Doherty et al., 2011; Inkson et al., 1997; Luring & Selmer, 2013; Selmer & Luring, 2011b, p. 2056; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) that we believe could be related to their organizational commitment, we decided to conduct semi-structured interviews and create an interview guide to help us keep track of and cover the topics that we suspected would be relevant. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are in line with our epistemological philosophy since this type of technique allows us to guide interviews towards the direction that seems to be most interesting or towards topics previously not considered (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 324).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Shanghai, China. We argue that being physically present in the same place enhances trust and thus has the potential to extract longer and more detailed answers. During the face-to-face interviews, both researchers were present with one being the main interviewer responsible for asking questions and the other taking notes and making sure that no important questions or topics were forgotten. The interviews took place in either small cafes or participants' offices depending on their wishes. The interviews were recorded using both smartphones and a computer program in order to minimize the risk of losing data because of technical or other problems. However, this happened once and thus the empirical findings of Eric's interview were written according to the notes taken during the interview. He later validated his answers and wished not to include nor erase any information.

The advantage of recording was that it allowed us to review not only what each of the participant had said but also in which tone and whether the response came abruptly or with hesitation (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 339-341). Each of the participants was interviewed one at the time and the duration varied between 37 minutes and 71 minutes, the majority being around one hour. The reasons for the variation in times were due to the individuals having very different experiences, which resulted different number of follow-up questions. Also, the eagerness to talk and being “wordy” in the responses differed from person to person.

### **2.2.7 Interview Guide**

When it comes to formulating the interview questions, we used open questions, probing questions and specific questions as categorized by Saunders et al. (2009, pp. 337-339) as the starting point of the interview. In addition, based on the participant’s answers, some follow-up questions were formulated at the time of the interview. Even though the questions were our own design, we used many of the previous scholars’ material as a source of inspiration or the gently modified versions of their questions. This was done in order to cover all the theoretical topics that we found relevant in relation to our study. The questions in the interview guide were divided according to the ten different themes that they were covering; Personal Information, China, Previous Work Experience, Career, Organization, Current Position, Social Life, Family, Future, Stay in China and Return. Each of the themes then consisted of several main questions that we wanted to focus on and multiple sub-questions that we used only if the answer given by the interviewee did not completely satisfy us. However, the initial idea was to first and foremost allow the respondents to describe and explain their experiences, feelings and reason for their actions as freely and openly as possible. The complete interview guide is attached as Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis.

An important consideration is to observe that all the interviews were held in English. This decision was made due to the interviewees being of different nationalities and hence the use of one language would enhance the comparability of the answers. We further argue that the questions asked were not highly technical or advanced so that we do not believe that the language competences played a very big role when it comes to participants expressing themselves in the most accurate manner. All the interviewees had also been working in an international environment and were very much used to speaking English on a daily basis.

### **2.2.8 Managing Data from the Participants**

After interviewing participants, we transcribed each of the interviews as it is an efficient and frequently used method for analyzing qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 485). Transcribing as a term is about reproducing the recorded material in the form of actual words (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 485). The important notion here is to not only express what is said and by whom but also pay attention to the tone and pausing as well as to the non-verbal communication of the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, p. 482; Saunders et al., 2011, p. 485). The process of transcribing helped us to get a good overview of what the respondents said and further diminished the risk of subjective interpretations as we did not have to rely entirely on our memory or wind up the records to double check something but could read the actual text (Heritage, 1984, p. 238, cited in: Bryman & Bell, p. 481). After transcribing all the interviews we read them through very carefully and started to look for similarities

and differences and establish relationships and patterns. During the data analysis process, we found some useful quotes that are later on used for highlighting some of the interesting events and facts that were discovered during the interviews. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 535) state that the use of quotes can be a powerful and simple way to explain otherwise difficult concepts.

When it comes to analyzing the data, we decided to perform a narrative analysis as it seemed to be the most appropriate one for our research purposes. This is due to the fact that narratives are said to be a good way for examining linkages, relationships and socially constructed explanations and often utilized in connection with semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 514). In our research, we need to understand SIEs' career capital development in China. This is to say that we are interested in their perceptions of how the experience in this foreign destination has had an impact in their professional lives. According to Bryman & Bell (2009, pp. 531-532) and Saunders et al., (2011, p. 495), narrative analysis is an approach that attempts to elicit and analyze the language that individuals use for creating stories about their lives, events or experiences surrounding them. These stories are told in a sequential manner and taken together, form a significant meaning to the individual and can further communicate significant meaning to the researcher if analyzed in their original format without fragmenting them into pieces by developing categories (Saunders et al., 2011, p. 495, 497). Narratives are thus reflections of what we see, feel and experience and how we make sense of the surrounding world (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 162).

### 2.2.9 Thematic Analysis

Within narrative analysis there are different methods of interpreting the stories that make up the data (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). We have decided to specifically do a thematic analysis since it focuses more on what is said rather than how or to whom it is said and therefore the language is used more as a means or a resource to understand the meaning of spoken words (Riessman, 2004, p. 2,3; Riessman, 2008, p. 54). Moreover, the thematic method is useful when the aim is to find some common thematic elements across the narratives (Riessman, 2004, p. 3). This corresponded to our wish to find common patterns and relationships among the participants' experiences in their companies in China and furthermore perform an analysis that is divided in a thematic manner in order to better compare the responses and highlight the discovered similarities and differences. In the empirical chapter we have divided the findings by person and different categories while still keeping the narratives as intact as possible. In the analysis chapter the similarities and differences among the participants in relation to our theoretical frame of reference are lifted up.

It is possible to see different orientations regarding the thematic analysis. Riessman (2008, p. 57) gives an example of an early pioneering study by Williams (1984), which implicitly defines thematic analysis to be taking into consideration the biography as a whole and thus the researcher focuses on one single interview at one point of time and tries to organize the relevant pieces into a chronological biography. The same process is done to all interviews after which the comparison in terms of finding similarities, patterns and differences with the other interviews is conducted (Riessman, 2008, p. 57). Another important study by

Ewick and Silbey (2003) is very similar to that of Williams, the main difference being only “the story” being much shorter and rather a description of an event with unambiguous beginnings, middle parts and ends and thus are not a complete biography (Riessman, 2008, pp. 61-62). This implies that the reader learns about the narrator only in the context of demographic position (gender, class, and race) and in relation to the events and story categories, which are constructed in order to make comparisons across cases (Riessman, 2008, pp. 73-74). Since our research is concerned with understanding specific periods and episodes in the SIEs’ lives, we will use a similar approach to thematic analysis as Ewick and Silbey (2003). We have therefore focused on only the participants’ career and life in China and some background information about them is provided only in order to better understand their frame of references and make comparisons among them.

In both cases, according to Riessman (2008, pp. 58, 73) the starting point is the prior theory, which guides in terms of the interpretations of the spoken language. In a similar manner, the emphasis is on the events, “the told” (Riessman, 2008, p. 58). In thematic narrative analysis, “messy” spoken language is cleaned up and a clear plot line is constructed in order to make it readable (Riessman, 2004, p. 58,61). In our case, this means that sometimes some typical spoken words that are often repeated such as “like,” “hums “ and “yeah” are omitted when quoting the participants, as well as some related parts of the story told at different times during the interviews being pieced together.

#### **2.2.10 Limitations of Narrative Analysis**

As with any type of analysis, the narrative analysis is not without its limitations. The first issue identified by Riessman (1993, p. 65), concerns about validation meaning the extent to which the interpretations of the interviews are trustworthy. According to Riessman (1993, p. 65), the problem of validation can be looked from four different perspectives; persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. However, the underlying problem is that there is no universal or clear set of rules or procedures that would answer the question of validity in narrative analysis in a straightforward manner (Riessman, 2008, p. 200). The extent to which the interpretation is convincing and reasonable, i.e. persuasive, depends largely on the rhetorical skills of the writer but also the extent to which the alternative interpretations are considered (Riessman, 1993, p. 65-66) and theoretical claims are supported (Riessman, 2008, p. 191). In relation to our work, persuasiveness can be understood to mean the way argumentation for a certain interpretation is done. As for the correspondence, the question is whether the validity of the interpretation can be enhanced by letting the interviewee to read the transcriptions (Riessman, 1993, p. 66). This is due to the fact that human stories are not only dynamic but the final interpretations of the researcher can also be discussed and argued (Riessman, 1993, pp. 66-67). In our case, this implies that the same story can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the perspective and interpretation of the individual’s background. This is to say that the disagreements regarding the “right” interpretation of a specific meaning can arise due to the discrepancies between the narrator’s and the interviewer’s values and interests.

When it comes to coherence, three different kinds of criteria are suggested by Agar & Hobbs (1982, cited in: Riessman, 1993, p. 67); namely global, local and themal. Global coherence refers to the overall goal that the narrator has, for example, the interviewee’s

attempt to provide an overall picture of the organizational experience in China. Local coherence relates to way the interviewee describes how the event are “supposed to be” as contrast to how they actually turned out to be. Finally, themal coherence is about the content and the extent to which the same themes are repeated during a narrative (Riessman, 1993, p. 68). The basic idea in the criteria is to say that the interpretations made by the researcher, are constrained by the spoken words in many ways (Riessman, 2004, p. 189). When reflecting on these criteria in our study, it can be said that the interpretations that we have made are constrained by the interviewees’ spoken words and their own interpretations of the situations in the past in the sense that we, as researchers, have not been involved in their experiences. The last criterion, pragmatic use, means the extent to which a study may become a standard or a basis for others’ work (Riessman, 1993, p. 68). In the context of narrative analysis, this condition can be fulfilled by providing clear and detailed information about how the study was conducted as well as the original data available on request, thus making it possible for others to determine the trustworthiness of the inquiry (Riessman, 1993, p. 68-69).

### 2.2.11 Ethical Principles in Research

Ethical consideration is a topic that has grown its importance during the past decades within research practice (Patton, 2002, p. 277; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 168). Generally speaking it touches the issues about what is the appropriate way to access data, strategies to gain the access as well as the ethical issues to be taken into a consideration in relation to different stages of conducting the research project (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 168). Following the foundation of ethical considerations described by Saunders et al. (2009, pp. 168-200) and Bryman and Bell (2012, pp. 128-142 ), the following paragraphs are going to discuss the data ethics during the data collection method.

Ethics during the design and conduct of the data collection refer to issues that may arise during the data collection process in relation to the technique used (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 193). It is important to obtain the participants *informed consent*, i.e. they must agree voluntarily to participate and this consent must be based on complete information on what will be done and why (Christians, 2000, pp. 138-139). One should inform the participants that taking part is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point of time (Strohm Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009, p. 14; Greaney, 2012, p. 40; Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 190-193). Participants should be treated as individuals and not just means to new knowledge (Greaney et al., 2012, p. 39). We accomplished this mainly by orally getting the participant's consent in the beginning of each interview, but also by communicating with them via email prior to the interviews. This meant that we introduced ourselves along with the thesis topic and presented the interview process as well as informed them about the participants’ rights. The purpose of this oral consent was to approve that we indeed had obtained the person’s full consent and that the individual felt comfortable with participating. Furthermore, the consent process acted as means to clarify the research aims (Greaney et al., 2012, pp. 39-40) and avoid deception, i.e. giving false information about the overall goals, to the furthest extent possible (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp.136-137). Strohm and Kitchener, (2009, p.14-15) discuss the concept of fidelity in the connection with the researcher being honest and keeping promises. The same author highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining trust and good relationships with

participants since a failure to do this may cause serious problems for the entire group of professionals if their professionalism and ethical aspects are questioned (Strohm Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009, p. 15)

During the data collection process, we also kept in mind that we had promised the respondents full confidentiality and anonymity, the two concepts that fall under the principle of causing no harm to participants and are commonly accepted and applied regardless to research technique employed (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 128-129; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 194). In order to tackle this issue of anonymity, we changed the names of the participants and promised not to give out the names of their current employers or the companies that they were referring to. Also, no personal information was revealed or used for any other purpose than to present the empirical material and build up the final discussion. Christiansen (2000, p. 139) points out that despite the pseudonyms and disguised locations, the privacy protection of individuals has proven to be troublesome and in many cases, the insiders are able to fill in the missing pieces. We acknowledge this fact and have informed the respondents of the limitations regarding the protection of their identities.

Specific to interview ethics was the extent to which the exercised control is utilized (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 195). This implies that the interview location should be comfortable for the participant as well as the time of the day should not be unreasonable (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 195). Attention was paid to this and the meetings were scheduled according to the particular interviewee's daily plans. As for avoiding causing any harm or extra stress to the respondents, in the beginning of the interview the participants were notified that they were free to decline answering any of the questions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 195). This is linked to the principle of privacy as the respondents should not feel forced to reveal information that they consider sensitive (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 136).

### 3 Theoretical Framework

*Theory chapter outlines some of the prior theoretical contributions relevant to our paper. The following sections take up the development of SIE terminology, SIE attributes such as their characteristics, motivations to go abroad and the different career and mobility assumptions that are associated with them. The chapter ends with a concluding section that summarizes our thoughts pinpointing the research gap in the theoretical framework and finally lifts up the direction that our research is going to follow.*

#### 3.1 Development of the Terminology

The first significant article about SIEs can be said to be “*Expatriate assignment versus overseas experience: Contrasting models of international human resource development*” by Inkson et al. (1997) where the authors discuss the differences between the traditional expatriates and SIEs and the latter group’s growing importance within the field of human resource management. These two groups were back then addressed as EA and OE where the first one refers to the traditional expatriates (expatriate assignment) while the latter abbreviation comes from “overseas experience” (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 351) referring to what is known as SIEs or SEs today. Some of the early articles by Suutari and Brewster (2000) and Myers and Pringle (2005) in turn use the abbreviation SFE/SIFE to mean self-initiated foreign work experience. This term emerged to better match the European context as the term “overseas” was not very appropriate (Doherty, 2013, p. 98). In addition, Banai & Harry (2004) introduced the term “international itinerants” and McKenna and Richardson (2007) cite “independent internationally mobile professionals”. In the above cases, the definitions are modified to match a specific group of people within the larger population of SIEs. Thus, international itinerants can be narrowed down to “professional managers who are employed by at least two business organizations that are not related to each other, in at least two different countries” (Banai & Harry, 2004, p. 100).

There have also been other concepts that overlap with SIEs. For example Kühlmann and Hutchings’s (2010, p. 24) local-hired foreign managers and third country nationals (TCNs) (e.g. Tarique, Schuler, & Gong, 2006) are professionals who already live *expatria* in the host country and can thus be considered SIEs as they are hired locally and not sent there by the company that seeks to employ them.

The review of the literature shows that for a long time there was no common agreement about which abbreviation to use but rather both SIE and SE and several others as mentioned above, were utilized interchangeably. For example, Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) used not only the term SIE but also “self-expatriates” and “self-made expatriates throughout their text. However, the agreement about using SIE as the “right” term was reached in 2009 during a symposium at the Academy of Management, which gathered over sixty percent of those academics that had had their articles published in the field at the time being (Doherty, 2013, pp. 98-99). The concept of self-initiated expatriate (SIE) then came to consist of two distinguishing elements: “self-initiated” to imply relocating voluntarily and independently across the world, “expatriate”, to distinguish from permanent movers (i.e. immigrants) and “foreign” was left out as it was viewed redundant and rather copying the meaning of expatriate (Doherty et al., 2013, p. 99).



The lack of consensus in terminology is also true when talking about traditional expatriates as they are sometimes addressed as OE where the letters stand for Organizational Expatriate (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013 etc.). To avoid confusion with the abbreviation OE, which Inkson et al. (1997) previously used to mean overseas experience, i.e. which is now SIE, we have chosen to use AE (assigned expatriate) when addressing the traditional expatriates and in accordance with what has been previously said, SIE when speaking about self-initiated expatriates.

### 3.2 Who is an SIE?

It has not only been the terminology of SIEs that has been lacking consensus. The actual definition of what an SIE is has also been in question over the years. Inkson et al. (1997) and Suutari and Brewster (2000) used wider concepts (overseas experience and self-initiated foreign work experience respectively) and focused mainly on the initiative coming from the individual in the SIE case as opposed to coming from a company in the case of AEs. Other differentiating characteristics were the goal, source of funding and career type (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352). The goals of SIE experiences (then overseas experience) were seen as more diffuse than the goals of AEs since SIEs were focused on individual development while AEs had specific project goals set by the company. The source of funding for AEs was their home country organization while SIEs were seen as funding their expatriation by themselves. AEs and SIEs were also seen as having different career types. AEs were characterized by having organizational careers while SIEs were seen as boundaryless. This view has been complicated since then by research on expatriates in connection to boundaryless careers, repatriation and retention issues that has given support to the view that AEs can also have boundaryless career attitudes (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 297).

The source of initiative still plays a main role in more recent definitions while other differentiating characteristics, although still relevant, have changed over the years as more research has been done. For example, that the source of funding of SIEs comes from the SIEs personal savings or casual earnings abroad (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352) was challenged by Suutari and Brewster (2000, p. 434) for being too simplified. Instead they argued that some SIEs may find employment prior to their departure and then get support from the *employing* organization in the host country. Suutari and Brewster (2000, p. 430-433) found that SIEs are a heterogeneous group within which there exists different sub-groups. Six sub-groups were identified: *young opportunists*, *job seekers*, *officials*, *localized professionals*, *international professionals* and *dual career couples*. *Young opportunists* traveled abroad for a mix of tourism and work, *job seekers* main motivation was a search for better career opportunities, *officials* worked for organizations like the EU, *dual career couples* were trailing spouses of AEs, and *localized professionals* had no clear plans of returning home. For some of these groups, their status as SIEs could be questioned. For the trailing spouses it is unclear how self-initiated their expatriation really is and the defining feature of the *localized professionals* raises the question of how to distinguish them from migrants.

The line between SIEs and migrants or immigrants has been a hot topic beside the vivid discussion about differences among SIEs and AEs (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1288). Several authors such as Andresen and Biemann (2012, p. 105) and Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010, p. 262) refer to migration in context with the SIEs even though some have argued that the concept of migration is only applicable when the intention is to settle to another country on permanent basis or at least there is no preliminary date for returning (Andersen & Gustschin, 2012, cited in Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1288). According to Dorsch et al., (2012, cited in Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1288), SIEs usually have an intention to return to their home countries, although there are exceptions when the SIEs choose to permanently reside at the host country location. However, whether or not they still can be regarded as SIEs in such cases has been questioned (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1289).

Cerdin and Selmer (2014, pp. 1289-90) recently proposed a conceptual definition of SIEs based on four defining criteria, self-initiated international relocation, regular employment, intentions of a temporary stay and skilled/professional qualifications. The self-initiated aspect focuses on who starts the expatriation process and Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1289) also set some further restrictions for the definition by adding that there should be no support of any kind from home country organizations to distinguish SIEs from AEs who request an international assignment within their organization. This is in line with Inkson et al.'s (1997) notion of source of funding, where in the SIE case, funding comes from the expatriating individual instead of a company as in the AE case. However, Cerdin and Selmer (2014) go a bit further by excluding also non-financial support from a home-country organization.

Regular employment or at least an intention thereof, was included to differentiate SIEs from very short term visitors in a country. This might then also exclude at least some of the young opportunists in Suutari and Brewster's (2000, p. 430) research whose reasons for going abroad were a mix of tourism and work. To differentiate SIEs from immigrants, Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1289) argue that they should have an intention of returning home. This criteria would then exclude Suutari and Brewster's (2000, pp. 431-432) localized professionals from the group of SIEs. Finally, skilled/professional qualifications is argued to be connected to expatriate status and should therefore be part of the SIE definition according to Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1290). Inkson et al.'s comparison between expatriate assignments and overseas experience did not put any emphasis on this requirement and it was argued that most people undertaking overseas experience planned to take whatever jobs they could to get by and continue their travels (1997, p. 358).

Based on their four criteria, Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1293) define SIEs as "expatriates who self-initiate their international relocation, with the intentions of regular employment and temporary stay, and with skills/professional qualifications". The Venn diagram in figure 1 illustrates their view that only individuals who fulfill all four criteria should be considered SIEs.

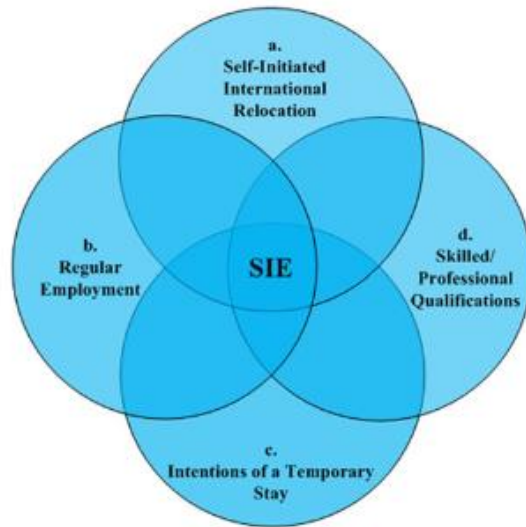


Figure 1. Venn Diagram of SIE Definition (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1290)

This definition does provide a very clear cut framework for distinguishing who is an SIE and who is not according to Cerdin and Selmer's view. This definition is however very new and to our knowledge it has not yet been extensively tested. The distinction between SIEs and immigrants is a main issue when creating a definition of SIEs. Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1296) do this by introducing the criteria of intention of temporary stay and suggest that this should be ascertained by two screening questions: "Was it your initial intention to repatriate after a certain time?" and "Do you still plan to return to your home country in the coming months or years?". We see some potential problems with these questions as a way of defining SIEs.

First of all, in today's globalizing world, we argue that it makes less sense to say that planned return to within the manmade borders of one's home country is a requirement for SIEs. Consider a French person working in China and who plans to return to Europe but not necessarily to France. If we consider him/her a European, she intends to repatriate and can be considered an SIE, but if we consider her French then she is something else. These many requirements risk creating a myriad of labels for self-initiated international professionals who in the end might have very much in common and distinguishing between them may be of limited use to the organizations that employ them.

Second of all, in the Chinese and similar contexts this might create some difficulties. We fear that asking potential SIEs whether they still intend to return within the coming months or years, will elicit "no" answers from individuals who are currently not planning to return but has a general intention of leaving some time in the future. Since it is very difficult and uncommon for foreigners in China to obtain permanent or more than one year residence permits (or visas), and because these permits are often tied to their employment, i.e. no job, no permit, (Letian, 2005) considering oneself a permanent immigrant in the country becomes a challenge. The option available for foreigners who wish to stay longer is a D visa, which enables an individual to reside in China for 10 years. The requirements for this type of visa are, however, rather strict (Feng, 2005) and in reality only 0.2 percent of the

foreigners who lived in China at the end of 2012 had permanent residence permits according to People's Daily Online (2013). One example of a group of individuals whose status as SIEs could be questioned is locally hired foreign managers in Kühlmann and Hutchings (2010) study. Although theoretically some of these individuals could be immigrants, in the Chinese context due to both immigration policies (Letian, 2005; Maticic, 2013), and in our experience, sociological obstacles to being considered or wanting to be considered an immigrant in China, we argue that the vast majority of them are SIEs rather than immigrants.

Since the definition discussed above has the potential to exclude many groups previously considered SIEs in the literature we have not used it in its entirety to screen our participants as we are curious to see how it may affect future research. We applied the three criteria of regular employment (or intention thereof), skills/professional qualifications and self-initiated international relocation in our participant selection while excluding intention of temporary stay. This would then include most groups previously regarded as SIEs and also individuals who might have made the transition from SIE to immigrant according to Cerdin and Selmer's (2014, p. 1293) definition.

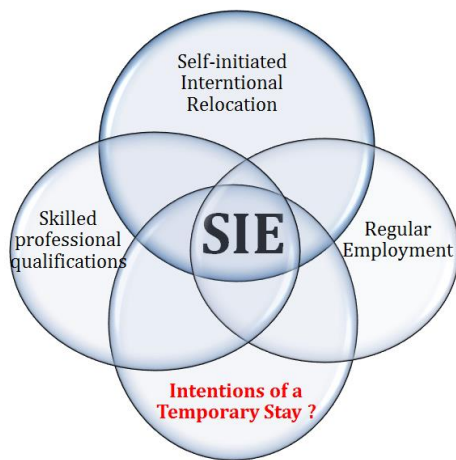


Figure 2. Venn Diagram Altered (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1290)

### 3.3 Characteristics of SIEs

The first study comparing SIEs and AEs in terms of their characteristics was done by Suutari and Brewster in 2000 (p. 429), which indicated that these two groups differ in the aspects of individual and employer related variables, motives, repatriation & future career plans and compensation. For example, SIEs were observed to be slightly younger and more often singles and females. A more recent study by Cerdin and Pargneux (2010, p. 291) also found the majority of SIEs to be females. These two studies also uncovered that SIEs work more often in lower management positions compared to AEs (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 291; Suutari & Brewster, 2000, p. 429). As for the other characteristics, SIEs were characterized by being more open to accept international assignments, often working for a home country MNC and sometimes staying permanently abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2000, p. 429).

### 3.4 Chinese Culture and Adjustment Challenges

According to The Hofstede Centre (2014), China is characterized by being a very collectivistic society with emphasis on traditional values, Confucianism, harmony and guanxi (interpersonal relationship). The worldview is based on virtue rather than truth, and things are seen more in many shades of gray rather than black and white. The hierarchy in organizational context is still very much in place and the leadership style is autocratic where employees are expected to follow a strict set of rules. Furthermore, having a broad network and good connections are the main determinants of one's work place (Lowe, 2003; Warner, 1993, p. 97). Hwang (1987, p. 961) states that the social power that one has is based on the social network rather than individual qualities or visible resources.

Guanxi in organizational context means fulfilling obligations or constantly exchanging favors but is not necessarily founded on friendship. It is a generally accepted and practiced method when hiring people (Sergeant & Frenkel, 1998, p.19). In practice, the application of guanxi implies that instead of looking at the performance and capabilities of a particular person as in the Western world (Scarborough, 1998, p. 16), it is personal connections that are the dominant factor. Understandably, guanxi among other traditional Chinese values, may cause some obstacles for expatriates when conducting business (Selmer, 2007, p.799; Sergeant & Frenkel, 1998, p. 19). Nevertheless, recent research indicates that due to growing number of Western corporations, mainly Joint Venture or Wholly owned Foreign Enterprises, there is a clear trend of setting up and following western style policies when it comes to Human Resource Management, salaries, compensation and promotion, for instance (Warner, 2008, p.779).

According to Selmer (2007, p.794), the distinctive culture is not the only problem that may undermine expatriate adjustment in China; there might be some psychological factors to be taken into a consideration as some of the assigned employees might feel either incapable of adapting to the new environment or simply just ignore the new reality due to lack of interest. Research has revealed that the highest level of work adjustment among expatriates in Greater China area was found in Singapore and Hong Kong and not on the mainland (Selmer, 2006a, pp. 2001-2002). It is worth of noticing that reasons for accepting an expatriate assignment vary among the individuals, which naturally has an impact on how the adjustment process will go.

China is not a challenging location only for those unwilling or reluctant to adjust, but also individuals with generally good intercultural skills can face many adjustment hurdles especially when it comes to language. Thanks to China opening up for foreign investment and the increase of foreign exposure of trade, science, sports and traveling, the nation is recognizing the need for improving their English skills leading to more and more people being eager to learn it (Boyle, 2000, p. 147). Still, lack of fluency in professional English among local coworkers is a problem that expatriates in China must be prepared to face. According to Education First's (2013) English Proficiency Index, mainland China has low English proficiency in general.

### **3.5 SIEs' Adjustment and Job Satisfaction**

Froese et al. (2012, p. 1108) studied 125 SIEs in South Korea and found out that the host country language proficiency along with social interactions with host country nationals have contributed to the adjustment process. In the similar manner, SIEs in Japan seemed to be better adjusted in the culture (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2009, p. 737) even though they reported to have lower job satisfaction in comparison with AEs (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011, p. 737). The authors of that study argued that the underlying reasons behind the lower job satisfaction were differences in individual- and job-related factors (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). Due to this study lacking empirical support a recent study by Froese and Peltokorpi (2013, pp. 1956, 1961) focused on examining the extent to which these individual- and job related factors have an impact on the outcomes of the SIEs and AEs in terms of their cross-cultural adjustment and job satisfaction.

The findings support the earlier research indicating that there is variation between job-related factors (Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). More specifically, the SIEs have a higher interaction adjustment level due to them spending more time in the host country and possessing better host country language skills (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013, p. 1964). The lower job satisfaction in turn is associated with SIEs working more frequently under the host country national supervisor regardless of their hierarchical position or the nationality of the employed organization (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013, p. 1964). The greatest job satisfaction level was found to be among those who intended to stay abroad only a short period reflecting the differences in the general expectations or alternatively indicated individuals experiencing problems in adjusting to the host society when extending their sojourn (Froese, 2010, pp. 343-345; Froese, 2012, p. 1108). The job satisfaction is also linked to the above mentioned host location attractiveness as the individuals with interest in the host destination or region stated to have a greater job satisfaction as well as the level of adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009, p. 1107). In a similar manner, the dissatisfaction was associated with “involuntary” stay as it was in some cases when individuals were forced to leave their home countries due to poor job conditions (Froese, 2012, p. 1109).

### **3.6 Motivations of SIEs**

The reasons for the increasing interest in SIEs may be the rapidly changing structure of economies. One of the early assumptions about this is made by Inkson et al. (1997, p. 359, 364) who suggest that open market economies enable individuals to take charge of their own career development and pursue their own goals rather than those of companies. This was based on the examination of 75 randomly selected people's overseas experiences in 1985-1995 in New Zealand. From the case study material, some common themes were drawn showing that the overseas experiences contributed to the individual's desire to see the world (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 352). Being an SIE allows the individual more freedom when it comes to the assignments whereas the job description of an expatriate is often determined from the headquarters (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 366). They further note that in the case of these assumptions being correct, many corporations need to change their human resource patterns and start paying attention to the fact that the employees are unlikely to spend their entire working life serving for one company only. This implies that companies need to better recognize how to collect the employee experiences and make the best use out of them before this person switches jobs (Inkson et al., 1997, p. 365). After this study,

similar findings have confirmed the trend for what is now known as boundaryless careers where the individuals make the decision to work and live abroad independently without the company involvement (Carr, Kern & Thorn, 2005, p. 386).

Suutari and Brewster (2000) found six sub-groups of SIEs whose motivations often differed. The *young opportunists* included young people who went abroad for extended periods of time, not only for work but a mix of travel and tourism as well. They were generally more motivated by professional development and advancing their careers than were other groups. *Job seekers* were individuals who moved from their home countries in search of more or better job opportunities. Their motivations were more often concerned with financial benefits. *Officials* referred to SIEs employed by international organizations like the United Nations or the European Union. *Localized professionals* represented individuals who for different reasons had decided to remain abroad for longer periods and were no longer treated as expatriates in their organizations. Their interests in internationalization were important motives for going abroad and they chose to stay there because they liked the local environment, perceived better career opportunities or had close relationships with locals. *International professionals* were global “mercenaries” who stayed outside their home country more or less permanently, jumping between companies and opportunities. *Dual career couples* were often spouses of expatriates who came along to find employment on their own in the country where their partners had been sent.

Crowley-Henry (2007, pp. 57-58) argued that locally hired expatriates, who can also be considered SIEs, had both subjective (e.g. self-fulfillment or personal development) and objective (e.g. financial rewards ) motivations for going and staying abroad. Even though some of the respondents in that study believed that staying in the host country was bad for their objective career advancement they still chose to remain. Crowley-Henry (2007, p. 58) argued that this indicates that there are other reasons that affect retention of SIEs in host country organizations and that the traditional view that more money or promotions are what matter most to employees needs to be questioned. Crowley-Henry (2007, p. 58) also argued for the importance of companies taking an active interest in SIEs social lives, settling-in processes etc. as this would likely increase their commitment to the organization. Crowley’s study was on locally hired expatriates in Europe and might therefore not be directly applicable to the context of SIEs in China.

The reasons for SIEs to expatriate have been found to be multifaceted. Selmer & Luring (2011b, p. 2064) investigated the extent to which the acquired demographics (marital status, nationality, previous expatriate experience and seniority) of SIEs vary between the reasons for expatriations. Their study about university academics in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands confirmed what had been previously studied by Crowley-Henry (2007) that the strongest impact on the desire to move was on the family status as non-married were the most mobile ones (Selmer & Luring, 2011b, pp. 2060-2061). Nevertheless, the future research asks for confirmation in a business company context (Selmer & Luring, 2011b, p. 2066). The findings further emphasized that it might be worthwhile for companies to pay attention to giving family support to the SIEs that have gone through the moving process by themselves as it has been identified to be one of the most influencing factors in terms of AEs.

In their study Cerdin & Pargeneux (2010) compared career anchors between AEs and SIEs. By this term, they mean the definition by Schein (1996, p.80) and Suutari and Taka (2004) which states a career anchor being an element (e.g. security, internalization, dedication to cause...) in the person's self-concept that the person is not willing to give up even when standing in front of a hard decision. It is concerned with individual's internal career and further presumes that individuals have a long-term preference when it comes to their work and working environment (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, p. 288; Suutari & Taka, 2004, p. 834). The conducted study revealed some surprising results showing that the most important career anchor for SIEs was the lifestyle anchor (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297). This variable refers to SIEs desire to achieve a balance between family/personal life and work. A need for security on the other hand was uncommon among both AEs and SIEs, meaning that they did not in general need a stable and secure life, especially when it comes to their career development (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297). However, the need was more common among SIEs than AEs which surprised the authors (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, p. 297). Furthermore, the results of internationalization anchor, the extent to which the individual was keen on moving abroad, showed that this factor was important for both SIEs and AEs but more so for AEs (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297). According to these authors, an explanation for this could be the fact that a sending organization provides more security and therefore can be used as a means for facilitating the process of going abroad (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, p. 297). This contradicts Suutari and Brewster's (2000, p. 419) expectations that the personal motivation for internationalization should be higher for SIEs than for AEs because of the role personal initiative plays in their decision to go.

Cerdin and Pargneux (2010, p. 296-297) concluded from their findings that the lifestyle career anchor was the most common for both groups of expatriates and argued that they might see expatriation as way of achieving balance between work and personal life. Another explanation that we see could be that expatriates face great challenges in balancing their work and personal/family lives, as has been shown by studies on expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinavas et al., 2005, p. 272; Hechanova et al., 2003, p. 221), which can then make the need for this balance more salient. This was also suggested by Suutari and Taka (2004, p. 844) in their study of global managers. In any case, a practical implication of Cerdin and Pargneux's (2010, p. 298) study is that companies employing SIEs need to pay special attention to their need for balance between work and personal/family life as this may be even more important for them than for AEs. Another interesting implication is that SIEs also seem to have a need for stability, especially in their career development (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 298). This complicates the view of SIEs as lacking commitment (Doherty, 2013, p. 451; Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 79).

When it comes to exploring the motivational factors behind the desire to go abroad, there is evidence that the main reasons among SIEs were not only the strong will to have an international experience but also the desire to work and live in a particular location (Froese, 2012, p. 1107). Similarly, prior research by McKenna and Richardson (2002, pp. 70-72) discovered that the driving factors were the motivation to explore, motivation to escape, (i.e. run away from personal problems/seek better professional/personal life), financial incentives and the motivation to use the experience in their career development. Doherty et al., (2011) compared the motivational factors of AEs and SIEs and came into a conclusion



that the three factors differing the most between the two groups were the location (the attractiveness of the location and perceived ability to adapt), career (the extent to which international experience was beneficial) and host (reputation of the host country as an employment opportunity) (Doherty et al., 2011, p. 605). The location and attractiveness of the host country were more significant factors among SIEs than AEs mirroring the notion that SIEs usually have more freedom to choose their destination than AEs who are bounded by the company's needs. However, the career building was more influential among the AEs (Doherty et al., 2011, p. 607).

### **3.7 SIEs as Boundaryless Careerists**

The concept of boundaryless careers started to emerge in the break of 1980s and 1990s when it was noticed that the dominant way of being employed in one organization and following their rules and practices for one's entire life was changing (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, pp. 3-4). The connection of the concept to SIEs was introduced by Inkson et al. (1997, p. 352) when the awareness and interest towards this kind of workforce started to rise. The boundaryless career is defined to be distinguished from that of traditional organizational careers, where the employee is "bounded" to one single employment setting (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 5), to indicate a career which comprises several assignments across multiple corporations and countries and where the individual him/herself is unilaterally the one responsible for it (Banai & Harry, 2005, p. 97; Inkson et al., 1997, pp. 352-353). Engagement in boundaryless careers can be used as an explanation to why the SIEs are not remaining with one organization but rather switching jobs frequently. This behavior in turn is rooted in the notion that SIEs are driven by doing psychologically meaningful work as opposed to earning money and being concerned with status (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 288). Carr et al. (2005, p. 389) argue that sometimes the individual perceive that his/her needs are better met in a foreign destination. However, SIEs are not the only group of people acting according to the frame of boundaryless career but the same kind of pattern is noticeable when it comes to AEs as well (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 297). Suutari and Brewster (2000, pp. 420, 427-428) take up the issue of expatriate repatriation, which has been proven to be problematic and thus one of the underlying reasons for expatriates' boundaryless careers. As mentioned in the earlier section, the career anchors important for AEs and SIEs are not that different from each other, both labor groups score high in lifestyle and internationalism factors (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 297).

A recent study by Rodriguez and Scurry (2014, p. 204) on SIEs in Qatar found that SIEs were much less planned in their career development than has been previously suggested (e.g. Inkson et al., 1997). This is in line with the study by Crowley-Henry (2012, p. 134) who described SIEs' career development through the use of a river metaphor after interviewing a group of SIEs in France. The metaphor illustrates how different opportunities and challenges flow in and out in an individual's career trajectory shaping the direction of it (Crowley-Henry, 2012, p. 134). The author further highlights that within this international context, there are many incidences that the individual has no control over and therefore these foreign professionals have adapted their careers to match the present external conditions (e.g. policies, legislation, cultural norms) and/or personal preferences at the time being (Crowley-Henry, 2012, pp. 136, 138). The view of SIEs as calculating

professionals who strategically plan their careers to make them more valuable to employers could not be supported in this context. Mitchell, Levin and Krumboltz (1999, p. 78) argue that the decision for expatriation, in any form, can instead of being an outcome of intensive planning, be more about seizing the opportunity as it appears. In our opinion, the emergence and practice of boundaryless careers can be seen as a consequence of the individuals seeking to find meaningful work. Switching jobs and organizations is not a goal or purpose in their career trajectory but rather something that individuals have to face in order to have jobs that they find interesting.

A similar term to boundaryless career is a protean career, which was first introduced by Hall (1996, pp. 8-15) to describe careers that are driven by individuals and are flexible. Several other authors have thereafter illustrated individuals with protean career being self-directed as they want to be the ones in charge of their career development and value-driven as they pursue their own career goals and strive for personal success (Briscoe et al., 2006 p.31). In short, having a protean career attitude means that the individual pays attention to the subjective career success, the extent to which the individual feels that he/she has accomplished the work-related outcomes he/she has set up (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179), as it further enhances subjective well-being. These work-related outcomes can be rather abstract such as the sense of self-fulfillment since they follow the individual's internal reflections of what they find desirable in their careers (Cao et al., 2013, p. 59). The study results by Cao et al. (2013, pp. 70-71) indicated that there is a positive connection between a protean career attitude and SIEs' career and life satisfaction. A positive connection was also found between protean career attitude and intention to stay in the host country meaning that the SIEs with protean career attitudes seemed to be committed to work at the host country location while staying there (Cao et al., 2013, p. 70). On the other hand, Cao et al. (2013, p. 72) also suggested that there could be negative impacts of SIEs having a protean career attitude that could be the focus of future research. They argued that their independence, claiming responsibility for their careers and high intrinsic motivation could make it difficult for them to identify with organizational goals and values. However, it is important to take into a consideration the fact that this study by Cao et al. (2013, pp. 71-73) addressed mainly Chinese people working in Germany. These employees had stayed relatively long in Germany and were highly educated, which, along with the cultural differences may have had an impact on the results of the study (Cao et al., 2013, pp. 71-73).

### **3.8 Career Capital Development of SIEs**

The development of career capital in context with SIEs is quite unexplored area of research. Some previous studies examine the topic in more general terms (e.g. Defilippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001), others have focused on traditional expatriates (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008) or flexpatriates, the most flexible group of employees (e.g. Mayrhofer et al., 2004). Eby et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between career competencies and boundaryless career success, but not in relation to SIEs. Hence, only a limited number of studies touch upon this issue in relation with SIEs and they mainly target the European or Middle Eastern context (e.g. Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). Interestingly, the results of the performed studies have not been coherent.

The objective of the study performed by Jokinen et al. (2008, p. 980, 990; Inkson & Arthur, 2001, p.51) was to explore the differences in development of career capital between the university-educated Finnish SIEs and AEs working abroad in different countries. Career capital emphasizes the wider set of capabilities that managers generally develop during their international assignments (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010) and is generally divided into three parts indicating three different types of knowing; knowing-how, knowing-why and knowing-whom (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 981). Knowing-how consists of skills and expertise as well as explicit and implicit knowledge related to the work that is cumulated over time and needed for performing (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994, p. 309; Inkson & Arthur, 2001, p.51). Knowing-why includes capabilities such as motivation and confidence reflecting the values and interests that build the fundamental foundation of individual's willingness to pursue a certain career path and can change over the career trajectory (Inkson & Arthur, 2001, p. 51). Knowing-why is thus seen as essential for building commitment in an organization (Jokinen et al., 2000, p. 981). Finally, knowing-whom refers to individual's social network in both intra-firm and inter-firm contexts (Jokinen et al., 2001, p. 981) including bosses, subordinates, customers as well as friends, acquaintances and peers (Inkson & Arthur, 2001, p. 51). Contacts established in one job can quite often be transferred and exploited later in the career as well (Inkson & Arthur 2001, p. 51).

The importance of the theory lies in the notion by Defilippi & Arthur (1996, p. 119), who claim that career capital competencies are not valuable per se, but rather the valuableness depends on the organizational context, namely, the extent to which the individual can contribute to the organization as a valuable asset. In their study, Eby et al., (2003, p. 703) concluded that the three ways of knowing can be utilized as significant predictors of boundaryless career success. The most value adding elements were knowing-why while the least important factor was knowing-whom (Eby et al., 2003, p. 703). The authors explain this by saying that while it is understandable that variables related to knowing-why, such as the ability to set realistic goals and try new things can explain the significance of the result, they acknowledge that the variables used for measuring knowing-whom were new to the literature and that the focus was mainly on the mentoring (Eby et al., 2003, p. 703).

Jokinen et al. (2008, p. 990) found that in any case, international experience provides a good learning opportunity for both SIEs and AEs as the respondents stated that the sojourn abroad had increased their self-awareness and competency level leading them to feel more comfortable in taking more challenging jobs in the future. This corresponds to what Osland et al. (2006, pp. 217-219) state about individuals increasing their global leadership development through challenges, which an international assignment can provide. An interesting finding was that being an AE is not the only way, or rather any better way, to develop global competences but that being an SIE offers equal possibilities to receive these learning outcomes (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 990). This finding has important implications since many recent graduates lacking the experience or opportunity to become an AE can now consider becoming an SIE as a viable alternative when it comes to developing their career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 990). The only exception was the extent to which the AEs learn about the organization. AEs reporting higher level could be explained by them being able to make comparisons between their home and host organizations. As for knowing-whom variable, the findings indicate more learning occurring among AEs, which, however, is not surprising since AEs already have established contacts in the organization

and can exploit them better than SIEs who basically start from zero (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 990). This was also partly due to the fact that the SIEs were more often working in lower level jobs compared to AEs since there was a positive connection between the rise in organizational position and increase in knowing-whom (Jokinen et al. 2008, p. 991). One considerable limitation of the study is the unknown size of the organizations which may play a significant role when it comes to SIE's possibilities to learn (Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 990).

On the contrary to what has been described above, a recent study about SIEs in Qatar argued that career capital of these international professionals was rather stagnating than increasing (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, pp. 202-204). This finding is intriguing, and it is of our interest to see the extent to which this can be only applicable to the Middle Eastern or Qatar context, where according to Rodriguez and Scurry (2014, p. 202) the social structure is very different and there is a big gap between the Qataris and non-Qataris. However, we assume that Europeans going to China may also encounter similar problems and feelings of being "left out" due to the cultural differences in organizations and everyday life.

### **3.9 SIEs and Organizational Commitment**

One important issue identified regarding SIEs is their perceived low commitment to the organization they are working for (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2009, p. 29; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). There are different views about how to measure commitment that have evolved over the years (Meyer & Allen, 1990, p. 710). Building on earlier work in this field (e.g. Becker, 1960; Porter et al. 1974; Wiener & Vardi 1980), Allen and Meyer (1990) integrated three different components of commitment into a model of organizational commitment and termed the components affective, continuance and normative commitment. In short, affective commitment (AC) regards a person's *emotional links* to an organization, continuance commitment (CC) regards *costs* involved in leaving the organization and normative commitments (NC) regards a person's perceived *obligation* to stay with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990, pp. 2-3). Organizational commitment has been found to correlate with job satisfaction, job variety, turnover intention, actual turnover, performance, attendance and organizational citizenship behavior (Bhuiyan et al., 2001, p. 21; Meyer et al., 2002, p. 39; Sani, 2013 p. 65; Srivastava, 2013, p. 164). This makes it an important factor in assuring effective and efficient management of employees in general and as we have identified, SIEs are a group where this might be overlooked.

More recently job embeddedness theory has been proposed as a strong predictor for explaining why people choose to stay or leave a certain organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). The theory of job embeddedness builds on the notion of how the individual has established connections to other people or activities, the extent to which it fits the person and his/her other aspects of life as well as what is the level of sacrifice, such as losing pension, involved when leaving (Lo et al., 2012, p. 4214). In their study, Lo et al., (2012, p. 4214) propose to add a third dimension, namely the host country community embeddedness to the traditional model, which considered linkages only towards the home country. They argue this to be important since they see SIEs being divided between the home country and the host country (Lo et al., 2012, p. 4214). The findings of the research revealed that the different job embeddedness dimensions have different roles that have different levels of

impacts that influence SIEs turnover intentions and job attitudes (Lo et al., 2012, p. 4225). Furthermore, the study outcome showed that strong embeddedness to home country community did not necessarily imply high turnover intentions. In contrast, it was discovered leading to SIEs having higher embeddedness in the host country and further causing the turnover intentions being lower (Lo et al., 2012, p. 4225). High host country embeddedness in turn displayed SIEs being more willing to stay and earn money at in the host country location.

In conclusion, the study by Lo et al. (2012) suggest that in order to reduce the turnover intentions and rates of SIEs, it is imperative for the organizations to enhance the organizational embeddedness as well as the host country embeddedness. The authors of that study states that this is due to the fact that higher embeddedness level to the host organization decreases the willingness to accept a job offer by a rival company. In practice, they suggest that corporations have to get a better understanding of what benefits this group of people prefers as they might place a high value on more “exceptional” or “nontraditional” incentives such as the possibility to regularly visit their home countries, for instance. Moreover, forming an expatriate friendly environment and taking into account the possible language barrier is highly relevant (Lo, et al., 2012, p. 4227).

Another significant study by Tharenou and Caulfield (2010), combined the job embeddedness with the theory of “shock systems” when trying to pin down SIEs’ reasons to repatriate. The shock system originates from the proposition by Lee and Mitchell (1994, p. 75) who state that the turnover is due to jarring events that can be either on or off job, more or less expected and either positive or negative. By jarring events, it is meant incidences that make the individuals to reassess their current situation in relation to their goals, plans and values (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1011). Their study contributed to the current knowledge in four different ways. First of all, shocks along with weak host country pull and strong home country pull strengthened the intention to look for employment at home country and leading to return (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1022). Shocks, especially negative ones coming from the home country, such as a family member getting sick, seemed to have the most impact (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1023). Weak host country pull, in turn, indicates that the individual has lower barriers to move out as he/she has a lesser level of attachment to the host country and thus the physiological costs associated with leaving the host destination are perceived to be low (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010 pp. 1022-1023). In a similar manner, a strong home country pull is associated with better benefits at home (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1023). However, Tharenou and Caulfield (2010, p. 1024) acknowledge that the majority of the people in the sample were Australian SIEs going from a developed country to another (such as Canada, UK, USA) where the cultural differences were small and therefore the generalizability of the study findings in a different cultural context is questionable.

A related problematic area when managing SIEs is avoiding their perceptions of being underemployed, i.e. not being able to work at their full potential. The study by Lee (2005, pp.183-184) on SIEs in Singapore confirmed the findings of previous similar studies that this could be detrimental to organizational performance. The study also found that this could be avoided by offering the SIEs more autonomy, paying more attention to personal suitability for the job in terms of the skills they possess and providing them with more task

variation. These factors contributed to fulfilment of the so called psychological contract, the extent to which the expected and received promises are kept, which enhances their positive feelings and satisfaction towards the work and organization. Lee (2005, p. 184) recognized the need for companies to address problems of underemployment and nurture the needs of SIEs to have fulfilling and challenging work roles. Lee (2005) did not specifically address organizational commitment but Maynard, Joseph and Maynard (2006, pp. 529-530) found that several dimensions of underemployment were associated with turnover intention and that perceived over qualification had strong correlation with affective commitment. Maynard et al.'s (2006) study only used respondents in the US and did not mention SIEs, but it is not unlikely that the same is true for SIEs in the Chinese context. Both Lee's (2005) and Maynard et al.'s (2006) studies were quantitative in nature and none included SIEs in mainland China.

### **3.10 Conclusion of Theory Chapter**

Lo et al. (2012, pp. 4227-4228) argued that companies need to increase job embeddedness of SIEs and that further research on how to do this would be valuable. In a similar manner, Tharenou and Caulfield, (2010, p. 1011) claim that being strongly embedded to the country and the organization, decreases individual's intentions to repatriate in the case of a negative event. We are curious to see how SIEs' career trajectories have turned out to be in reality. Despite a growing amount of research of SIEs we see that there is still a limited understanding of SIEs experiences in China and thus also of what can increase their embeddedness in and commitment to their organizations and host country.

It is unclear in the literature why or even *if* SIEs are lacking in organizational commitment. One explanation has been their affinity for boundaryless careers which in light of Rodriguez and Scurry's (2014, p. 204) and Briscoe and Finkelstein's (2009, p. 257) findings can be questioned. We argue that boundaryless career behavior and perceived lack of organizational commitment of SIEs can be the results of them struggling to find meaningful work and career opportunities. Many recent studies propose more research about SIEs from the boundaryless career and protean career perspective and pushes for challenging the taken for granted facts associated with the aforementioned concepts (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010, p. 297; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). Dickmann, Doherty, Mills and Brewster (2008, p. 748) found significant differences between which factors employers believed were most important for potential expatriates decision accept international assignments and the factors that the employees actually felt were important. We argue that it is not unlikely that similar misunderstandings and assumptions exist on the part of organizations regarding SIEs. This can then lead to inappropriate HRM policies that hinder or at least do not help SIEs to perform at their full potential.

Kühlmann and Hutchings, (2010, p. 31) found that Australian and German companies in China lacked in their support of SIEs training and career development needs even as they complained about this being a problem. Similarly, Rodriguez and Scurry (2014, p. 204) concluded that there was limited understanding of the need for career development support for SIEs and that such processes and activities were not made available to them. Specifically, localization strategies and the organizations' use of SIEs as "experts" seemed to lead to them being overlooked when it came to employee development (Rodriguez &

Scurry, 2014, pp. 199-201). As experts, SIEs are assumed to have all the skills that they need to do the job they are hired for. Another reason for SIEs not being considered for career development investments can be the perception of them to be lacking in organizational commitment (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014, p. 205). This may then turn into a vicious cycle where organizations are reluctant to support SIEs because they are perceived to lack commitment and SIEs' commitment to an organization will falter as they do not receive the support they need. This may have linkage to the notion of underemployment if the SIEs feel that they are not given an opportunity to grow and perform tasks that they are interested in and hence they may be more likely to be looking for options outside of their organizations (Lee, 2005, p. 184).

Rodriguez and Scurry (2014, pp. 204-205) also recognized the importance of context for explaining different SIE experiences and how they are treated by organizations. They found that macro-level country specific challenges in Qatar affected how organizations viewed SIEs which affected their career possibilities and overall experiences. Localization strategies in a certain country are one factor that can affect the availability of development activities for SIEs. Other factors that can affect SIEs' situations are country policies and regulations that put restraints on the mobility of foreigners and visa regulations that position them as temporary workers. In China, it is extremely difficult to get a permanent residence permit or become a citizen of the country and hence an individual's legal right stay generally depends on their ability to find a job and be employed. Because of low wages in China, SIEs may also be at a cost disadvantage when organizations want to localize operations in China. This, we argue, makes China interesting place for studying career capital development of SIEs.

Besides looking at SIEs from the organizations' point of view, another factor that is interesting is the SIEs' perceptions of their career capital development in China. Especially the extent to which it may include unique components those companies could utilize by employing this group of professionals. As stated before, the findings have not been coherent; the research from Qatar showed that in some counties, the career capital development could even be stagnating (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014). Since it has been indicated that boundaryless career success is related to the three "knowings" of career capital (Eby et al., 2003), and because SIEs have been strongly associated with boundaryless careers and also have been found to have strong focus on their own career development, we believe that by looking at SIEs experiences in China in terms of career capital development and organizational commitment we can increase understanding of how organizations can retain and benefit from SIEs acquired career capital in China.

We agree with Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010, p. 264) that even though SIEs may have taken responsibility for their own careers, their employers still have a duty to aid them in their development. This should also be in the company's own best interests as it is a matter of avoiding costs associated with turnovers and capitalizing on a valuable resource. This implies that host country organizations need to develop their policies in order to retain SIEs. It is of our interest to contribute to this unexplored area by investigate how organizations can increase SIEs' organizational commitment and benefit from their acquired career capital in China.

## 4 Empirical Findings

*In this chapter the empirical findings are presented in the form of narratives or individual stories. The results are shown first in the form of a summary table, where some important background information is taken up. The material is then presented person by person and further it is divided into specific themes that make the story more organized and reader-friendly. In the end of the chapter, the results of organizational commitment measurement questions are also provided.*

### 4.1 Participant Profiles

Table 1 (below) summarizes the socio-demographic profiles of the participants as well as shows the length of the each interview. The majority of the interviewees were men (8 out of 10) and most of the participants were either Swedish or Finnish citizens. The number of previous employments in China ranged from 0 to 5 and the total time spent living in China varied from 1 year up to 19 years. The current employment status was self-employed, unemployed or employed. The extent to which the participants had acquired some previous experience abroad differed with some participants not having it at all while some other had been in international locations for several years. The names have been altered to protect the identity of the respondents.

ID	Length of Interview	Country of Origin	Number of Previous Employments in China	Status of the Current Employment	Total time in China (years)	Previous International Experience
Alfred	64 minutes	Finland	1	Self-employed	7	Worked 10 years in Sweden
Pablo	61 minutes	Spain	1	Self-employed	3	Studied in the UK & Poland
Sophie	54 minutes	France	3	Unemployed	1,5	Studied in Hong Kong, worked in Spain
Ben	37 minutes	Sweden	5	Employee/self-employed	>5	No
Ellen	59 minutes	Sweden	0	Employee	1	Internship in the UK, work in Canada, studied in China



Mike	45 minutes	Finland	2	Self-employed	19	No
Eric	65 minutes	Sweden	0	Employee	3	Worked in NY
Carl	71 minutes	Finland	3	Employee	10	No
Matt	71 minutes	Finland	0	Self-employed	10	Worked in the USA
Dan	66 minutes	Sweden	3	Employee	11	No

**Table 1: Participant Profiles**

## 4.2 Alfred

### 4.2.1 Background

Alfred is in his forties and comes from Finland but built his career in financial IT in Sweden during ten years. He first worked for a Swedish company and in 2000 he took part in a start-up and later glided into general IT consulting as a private consultant. He is currently married and has a son.

### 4.2.2 Coming to China

Alfred came to China initially as a trailing spouse of his expatriate wife, but the couple had planned to move to China for some time and was actively seeking ways to make it happen. Alfred still remembers the moment when they made the decision to find a way to move to China: *“I remember the exact moment when we decided to move to China. I mean it was ...we stepped into the bus, tourist bus, here in Shanghai actually, we were traveling around China and right when you sort of pass the driver there I turn around and told [my wife] that and said “I think we should live here” and she said “yeah” (laughs).”*

However, the couple was working in Sweden and had a house and a life there which made moving more difficult. Alfred chose to work as private consultant so that it would be easier to go if an opportunity would come up. When an opportunity later presented itself for his wife to be sent by her company to Shanghai, the couple quickly decided to take it. Alfred had then worked in Sweden for ten years and both he and his wife felt that it was time to leave. His wife’s expatriation opportunity became a tool for realizing their plan: *“Her expatriate, sort of assignment was our tool to come here. We were actively seeking for that because it is very, very difficult to come to China on your own because you can’t just come here.”*

So Alfred and his wife originally came to China as an expat couple, but that changed when his wife’s company wanted to relocate them: *“a year or two later, the company... sort of...*

*they didn't have their strategy quite in order so they didn't know what to do. And they wanted to move us to Hong Kong ...and after careful consideration we declined.”* This marked the start of the couple’s more clearly self-initiated expat experience. This was a huge step for them. They decided that instead of going to Hong Kong to a more certain employment situation, the couple would stay in Shanghai and try to make it on their own. This was obviously a risky decision and one that had Alfred a bit worried in the beginning: *“And it’s an extremely scary situation. I’m speaking about my own experience... it’s very, very scary. But it’s also somehow... having done that... you start looking in a different way... you’re a bit more realistic and you realize a lot of things about what you’ve gotten used to in Scandinavia... and you realize that... the security over there is in a sense... also an illusion. Let’s put it that way.”*

#### 4.2.3 Staying in China

Alfred has now lived and worked in Shanghai for seven years. He considers himself an immigrant in China in a way but he is now and then considering alternatives. He states that he came here, not with a forever, but for now mindset. He does not want to go back to Finland but would consider going to other places in Southeast Asia. His wife and son are currently living in Spain and he has considered taking a break as well but says that even if he was to move he still would have something to do with China. Alfred argues that Shanghai and China is the most interesting place in the world to live right now: *“I mean, you become a “tempo-junkie” when you live here because you get used to the pace of things happening and the opportunities coming and the people you meet and everything.”* Relatedly he states that another reason that ties him to Shanghai and China is his friends and network: *“I realized that one of the greatest things about living in Shanghai and having your friends here is that every single one of your friends is a CEO. CEOs tend to be smart people.”* The third reason he gives for staying is that he has invested a lot in China, in terms of time, effort and money. He argues that his China knowledge gives him an important competitive advantage as both an employee and an entrepreneur.

#### 4.2.4 Career in China

When he came to China Alfred started to figure out what he was going to do. He began looking at venture capital and investment opportunities, trying to find the right people with the right idea to help friends back in Sweden to invest. He did this for about half a year but did not find a perfect enough match to be able to go full force: *“You need to find the right people and the right idea. Many times I found the right people with a poor idea and then I found also the wrong people with the right idea (laughs).”*

Instead he became involved with an organization that worked to promote and support Finnish business interests in China. He started writing for their magazine which he describes as a poorly paid but fun job that allowed him to get in touch with many Finnish companies. *“In a couple of months I had the best network here in Shanghai among Finnish companies so that was really, really good in that sense.”* This job then evolved into a more advanced leading role and Alfred transformed the organization into what it is today: *“When I started, it was nothing. It was a group of people meeting up once in a while. Now it’s an actual organization with a proper budget and a membership fee.”*

This job he describes as very free and even though he reported to a board of directors he didn't feel as if he had a boss. He led the change and knew what needed to be done and while he discussed ideas with the board he had very much freedom. *"[It] was perfect for me because I was able to do work, even if there was a structure there, it still gave me the freedom that I needed."* Alfred was at one point a part of the board of directors and later became the executive director. When asked why he left this job he stated that the main reason was that things were becoming routine: *"Been there, done that kind of thing. I mean there was nothing for me to learn anymore. I want to learn. It was getting too monotonous."*

#### 4.2.5 Current Situation

Alfred is now running a company that he founded together with two other SIEs. They provide market analysis and other services to Scandinavian companies interested in China. The company is young, less than half a year, but they have already signed a very good deal with a big company that wants to redo their China strategy completely. At this point only three people including Alfred are working at the company.

#### 4.2.6 Networking and Adjustment

As mentioned above, Alfred's friends in China are one of the main reasons why he likes living there. He has built a very valuable social network of CEOs and other upper management professionals, especially among Finnish people and some other westerners living in Shanghai. He admits that he does not have too many Chinese friends and the ones he does have are all very international and they communicate in English. They come mainly from his working relationships. One cultural difference that he has noticed between his western and Chinese friends are for example that even if he has known one Chinese person for many years, he has never been invited to her home: *"That's the culture issue... Chinese people do not invite you home. We do that. And of course she's been many times to our home. The only people who go to a Chinese home is probably the family. Even among Chinese it's very uncommon to invite anyone home."*

#### 4.2.7 Skills and Development

The main skills that Alfred has developed in China are his understanding of the country, its culture and its people. *"My service is that I provide understanding of China to non-Chinese."* He explains that China presents many challenges to someone who comes to the country: *"[In China], nothing is easy but everything is possible."* Regardless of whether you are an entrepreneur or not, he argues that you have to think like one in terms of what you can offer that is unique on the market. Problem solving and getting to the core of problems in contacts with Chinese authorities is one specific skill he has developed: *"The first two, three, four or five noes are probably noes for specific questions you have regarding the problem, where you think the problem is but you have to really think what is it that you want to achieve."*

#### 4.2.8 Expat vs SIE:

As an entrepreneur, Alfred may soon be in a position that he will need to hire more employees for his company. When comparing SIEs and Expats as potential hires he argues

that SIEs are much more realistic since expats are much more expensive. He also sees that quite a lot of people in China make the transition from AEs to SIEs, coming first as expats sent by their companies and then when that situation for some reason ends, they decide to stay. Alfred says of SIEs that: *“When we speak about the self-initiated expatriate I pretty much immediately think of an entrepreneur.”* He argues that people who do come here on their own initiative are risk-takers and that they have a different mindset from other people. He says that this does not necessarily translate into setting up and running your own business but that these people *“definitely place a lower value on a perceived security”*. He further describes them as curious and willing to do something different as well as having open minds.

#### **4.2.9 Career Goals and Needs:**

Alfred admits that he is not very comfortable working for organizations because there are too many limitations and he has realized that he makes better decisions alone than in a group: *“That’s what happens in organizations, you have to compromise too much and... I don’t do very well in organizations.”* Alfred needs freedom in his role to feel comfortable and his goal is to retain that freedom in the future: *“So being a freelancer is definitely what I want to do. I guess I just have too little respect for authority to work in an organization where you have to report too much upwards or something like that.”* He also describes himself as *“a little bit on the extreme side when it comes to risk taking”*.

### **4.3 Pablo**

#### **4.3.1 Background**

Before going to China, Pablo was working in the family business doing different jobs in marketing and sales and also tried to run his own business. Pablo has also a study exchange experience from Poland, which he claims to be an eye opening experience. *“Once you start to travel, you have the opportunity to study abroad, you can open your mind, you can learn about different cultures and then you understand that you have to open your mind”*. He further argued that international experiences changes people and also gives them a competitive advantage over those who lack international experiences.

#### **4.3.2 Why China?**

Pablo came to China 3 years ago after graduating from Spain with a Master’s Degree in International Business and Management. The reason for going to China was partly due to the recession and weak job opportunities in Spain but also due to Pablo’s personal desire to go there.

*“You have to find a way to develop your career, your life. This is one of the main reasons that I decided to come to China, because I didn’t have this kind of opportunity in my hometown, in my home country in Spain. I think that Asia, especially China has this opportunity and that is why I decided to come here to China.”*

### 4.3.3 Stay in China

For Pablo, it was clear from the very beginning that he was going to stay there for a long time. His initial plans have not changed as doing business requires hard work and is a big investment in terms of money and energy. He also thinks that Spain would not offer him anything better so that's why he might as well stay and work in China. Due to him leaving Spain for economic reasons, Pablo sees himself as an immigrant or at least a more long-term resident: "*I feel like an immigrant, yes, the life; the situation forced me to decide to come here*". When talking about the future and the possibility to work in Spain, Pablo is somewhat hesitant and is not sure whether he would like to go back if the opportunity came but he does not intend to retire in China. He also hopes to visit his family more often, at least once a year.

### 4.3.4 Career in China

He found his first job through his university teacher who introduced Pablo to a Chinese businessman who in turn, was willing to offer Pablo an opportunity to learn about Chinese culture through an internship in a UK based trading company. The internship took place in Shanghai, China and lasted about 6 months. The job taught him how to do business in China, about required certifications and regulations and problems within international trade. As an employee, Pablo was treated well but it was very much up to him to ask for training and make sure that he kept learning: "*I mean they gave training just because I asked; I was working hard, asking a lot of questions... This is China, nobody is going to come to you and teach you. You need to be proactive*".

Currently, Pablo is working for two different companies; one of them being a trading company while the other company brings students to China for internships. The company has several offices all over the world and at the moment there are total of four people; two Chinese and two foreigners, Pablo included, working at the Shanghai office. Pablo describes the organizational culture being fresh and young where the best thing is the committed and hard-working team.

### 4.3.5 Networking

According to Pablo, networking is key when doing business in China. However, building trust with the Chinese is a long process compared to Europe where business ties can be done in a few days but, in turn, last also for a shorter period of time. When it comes to comparing the importance between Chinese and the foreign contacts, Pablo says the foreign contacts being more important for them reflecting their current business where the international students are placed in foreign companies. He concludes: "*You have no relationship you cannot do business*".

### 4.3.6 Skills and Development

Pablo's career goal is not only to develop himself but also to do something meaningful. Referring to his current business of helping students come to China for internships, Pablo states: "*I feel this is a wonderful project because I've had the same experience and I feel very close to these people*". He means that working for money only, would make him feel empty inside. He says that the stay in China has changed him both personally and

professionally. He admits that it is hard to be away from the family but at the same time China has taught him about values and what is important for him. He therefore recommends other people to try China, at least for a short period of time, since even a negative experience can be useful and educative.” *So at the end of the day, either you like, you love it or you hate it, China, everybody who comes here always takes something good with him”.*

When it comes to knowing Chinese, Pablo admits that his language proficiency is not very high. He said that as the language is very hard and cannot be learned like English, he had to make a choice between learning Chinese or practicing his business and focusing on the business will be the plan for the next coming years.

#### 4.3.7 China Knowledge

Pablo says that China is a difficult country and nothing is easy there. The business culture is different and even with some experience, it is necessary to stay in China and learn about the country before starting your own business. Pablo says that as a foreigner many Chinese may try to trick you but at the same time they can be very helpful as they understand that you are in an unfamiliar environment. China is full of opportunities but in order to best exploit them, it is essential to have money and knowledge or at least doing business demands courage.” *You think that you go to China just to see if you can do it? You need to be sure, you need to be sure what do you want to do, how do you do it and for sure, because every day in China everything changes.”* Every day there are different challenges or something new and unexpected happens. The main challenge is to be prepared all the time and being able to respond and solve the problems fast.

### 4.4 Sophie

#### 4.4.1 Why China?

Sophie came to China in December 2012 after being unable to find a job in her home country France. Her best friends were working in China at that time, and suggested her to go and try there. Going to Asia was nothing new to Sophie as she had been in Hong Kong as an exchange student: *“I studied in Hong Kong and that’s why I came to Shanghai because I knew that it was Asia and I had been to Asia before. So it wasn’t like a big step to go there.”* She first came to Shanghai with a tourist visa and thus had only two months to find employment. Before coming she had already been in touch with some of the companies and after performing well in job interviews, she was hired: *“I found a job and they gave me a visa so I stayed”.*

Before coming to China, Sophie had just graduated from a business school with a Bachelor’s degree in International Marketing and Management and a Master’s degree in Marketing and Communication. When it comes to professional experience, Sophie has had some consulting jobs in marketing, management and training and she has also had a summer job in Spain.

#### 4.4.2 Staying in China

The initial plan for Sophie was to stay in China for two months and see how the job situation would turn out. She believes that coming to China has been a good start for her career as the jobs there have included much more responsibilities compared to what she would have gotten back in France. She also claims that the city itself has something to do with the feeling she is currently having: *"The atmosphere here is more challenging and faster than in Europe"*. She means that in Europe, most people are satisfied with being able to pay the rent and eat while in Shanghai, people are there to work. Seeing others succeed makes one push harder and strive for better results.

At the moment, Sophie is looking for a job either in Shanghai or Hong Kong. The process, however, is taking a long time, which makes her worried as the time is slowly running out as her visa is valid only until June. She would like to stay in China for one or two more years to increase her network and experience. The possibility of setting up her own company in France sometime in the future is a possibility. She wants to return to Europe where her family and friends are missing her. She argues that the longer the stay in China, the harder the return will be.

#### 4.4.3 Career

While in China, Sophie has worked for three different companies. She started working for a French travelling agency, which had a branch in China for providing service for expatriates. The company was based in Beijing and Sophie's task was to open up a new office in Shanghai, which she found very interesting since she was alone responsible for the entire process including making the necessary partnerships and recruiting a team: *"We were sharing an office with another company. I was not working directly with Chinese people but I was in a working environment with Chinese people. That was very interesting too"*. She got an intern to help her to carry out the tasks.

After a while, Sophie was offered another job by another company through LinkedIn: *"Then I quit my job because it started to get a little bit boring and then I had another opportunity with a French company who wanted to get in to Chinese market"*. Besides the job not being challenging enough, she also claims the travelling agency had limited career climbing opportunities and interest towards her career development and thus she was afraid that her job would stay the same. She also thought that the management failed to make her feel "part of a family": *"It was because they were in Beijing and I was in Shanghai. We were working together just by Skype or phone. We didn't really have a real colleague relationship"*. She had hoped to have more face-to-face contact with the headquarters. In the end she was only doing the minimum amount of work and stopped caring.

Her second job was to conduct a market analysis as a freelancer for a French company that was interested in entering the Chinese market. She also did some work for a French retail and management company during the weekends but finally decided that it was taking too much time and that she wanted to have some personal life as well.

When talking about her professional life, Sophie says that career is very important for her. The main motivation she finds in challenges: *"I'm more looking for something challenging"*

*with responsibilities with the possibility of evolution than something calm and secure. I'm looking for a risky position where they could fire me...*" Even if offered a lot of money, she doubts that she would be willing to have a calm and secure kind of position for a very long time. She likes the fast moving elements and tempo and says that these things make life more interesting. Freedom in her work is also an important factor and that is what she has had through her freelancing jobs. This is also why she enjoyed her first China job in the beginning: *"I was working alone so basically it was my company. I did the strategy as I wanted but I had the support from the headquarters in Beijing. Basically I was in charge from the scratch"*. Besides challenge and freedom, Sophie feels like being international has become part of her identity and that she wants to work in an international context and preferably having a connection to Asia in the future.

#### **4.4.4 Network**

Sophie finds that networking in China is very important and that it is essential to go to different events where you can exchange business cards and then connect with people on LinkedIn. The nationality of the people does not seem to be playing a significant role except for the fact that connecting with the Chinese is much harder without the language skills since they are not very open to Westerners according to Sophie. In general, she finds foreigners in Shanghai being very friendly: *"I did some market research where I had to do some interviews and I just contacted people I had met once at networking and they said: 'yeah, sure come to me... they take time to help you do your business and your research'"*. Long-term relationships, however, can be difficult due to the city's fast pace. People are constantly on the move and staying only for a couple of years.

#### **4.4.5 Skills**

Since the travel agency did not provide Sophie any training, she learned how to plan her time and organize things as she was the only one responsible for setting up the Shanghai office. Some specific knowledge regarding China that she picked up was the importance of relationships: *"Everything is very fast but at the same time for the human relationship you need to be very slow and take your time and try to learn [about] people and the background and everything and not only like, 'do you want to make business?'"*.

#### **4.4.6 China Knowledge and Challenges**

The main challenges for Sophie in China have been the language as well as being far away from her family: *"Especially during Christmas, your birthday and everything. That's the most difficult part about living abroad"*. She also acknowledges that the individual's cultural fit is important since China is very different and therefore it asks for a high level of adaptability. According to Sophie, there are many people who have come to China with high hopes but left after a couple of months: *"China is giving you a lot but at the same time it takes a lot."*



## 4.5 Ben

### 4.5.1 Background

Ben is in his early thirties and comes from Sweden. He has a bachelor's degree in physical education from a Chinese university. Before coming to China he worked some stray jobs back in Sweden and enjoyed traveling a lot. He had been to America and all over Europe but China and Asia was new to him.

### 4.5.2 Coming to China

Ben originally came to stay in China as a student and then went home for a short period and then returned to find work. It began with a desire to try something different than Sweden. By coincidence he had friend who was living in China at the time, so he went to visit him for a month and became very interested in going to China again for a longer period. He then decided to go as a student to study for six months. Six months became a few years and now Ben has been in China for more than five years. Right now the plan is to stay one more year and see what happens: *"My current goal is like, stay one year, see if something else comes up otherwise go back to Sweden maybe."* He still likes living in Shanghai but he does not like it as much as when he first came. He says that Shanghai is changing fast, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse.

### 4.5.3 Career in China

During his studies in China, a friend introduced him to a Chinese company where he has worked as a consultant for a few years now. The company is quite big and has offices all over China and he estimates the number of employees in his office to a few hundred. He has also been doing shorter freelance consulting jobs for about five different companies over the years, mainly Scandinavian. These have included translations and export/import related tasks. He says that working for a Chinese company is a different experience than working in Sweden and that it has advantages and disadvantages. Even though he has a regular job now for a Chinese company he does not consider it to be very stable.

On the negative side the company does not offer him any training or development programs, so it is very much up to himself to improve his skills and he says that there is no way for him to progress up the career ladder within the company. He hints at host country ethnocentrism being one aspect in this treatment: *"for a Chinese company if they employ you the only reason is because, like your skin, your skin color. If they can find a Chinese person to do the same job, they would find a Chinese person but they can't replace you because the color of your skin so that's basically it."* The nature of the services that the company provides has many of its Chinese clients believing them to be better performed by westerners and thus the company must keep a number of westerners employed.

He describes a normal day at work as very chaotic: *"You don't know what to expect, you have a schedule but that schedule can change or there's... like basically... you don't prepare, you just prepare for anything."* He sometimes finds it a challenge to accept all this chaos and not let it bother him. On the positive side he likes the working hours and pay: *"For the amount of hours I actually work, the salary is ok."*

#### 4.5.4 Skills and Development

Ben has learned that in China he has to take more own responsibility and not count on others: *"It doesn't matter if they have a position, like their position is higher than yours but that doesn't mean they actually know what they're doing."* To prepare for anything and expect the unexpected is also something he has grown accustomed to. Patience is another virtue he has developed more in China. He also argues that westerners who come to China should realize that their own values and experiences from their home country cannot always be applied here: *"YOU have to adapt to the way they are, you can't expect them to adapt to like... the western point of view."* Ben has also become fluent in Chinese during his time in China.

#### 4.5.5 Networking and Adjustment

Ben's social network in China consists of both westerners and Chinese people but he has more Chinese friends than western friends. He argues that both groups can be important for career development and it depends on what one wants to do. He says that if one wants to work for a company and have a good job with good working conditions, then it is important to have a network of westerners which can help one find this job. However, if one wants to start a business, he argues that a strong Chinese network is essential: *"You can't do it by yourself, it doesn't matter how much money you have if you come in here if you don't have Chinese people on your side, like, there's nothing you can do."*

#### 4.5.6 Career Goals and Needs

Ben now states that he is at a crossroads in his career; his current plan is to stay one more year and try to find more meaningful employment or some entrepreneurial opportunity. If nothing comes up he plans to go back to Sweden and hopes to use his experiences in China to do consulting back home and maybe go to China once every year or so to help people on location with business related tasks.

He argues that there are two ways to become successful in China, either one should come to China with an expat package or one has to get a good understanding of the culture and build a network of people in China that can help to turn an idea into a profitable business. He further states that SIEs who come here to work must bring something unique: *"So if you're doing something it has to be something that they can't replace if they are actually going to pay you a salary that's higher like... than a regular Chinese persons'."*

For his future career, Ben is looking for a role that would be dynamic and mean that he would have different challenges every day and get to work in different fields and with different people.

#### 4.5.7 Expats vs SIEs

When it comes to differences between AEs and SIEs, Ben believes there are very big differences. He feels that people like him who have come here on their own have much better understanding of China and the Chinese culture. The two groups have very different lifestyles and hang out in different circles.

## 4.6 Ellen

### 4.6.1 Background

Ellen is from Sweden and in her late twenties. She holds a master's degree in management from a Swedish university and has previously worked as a buyer's assistant in Sweden but gave that up to go to university. She wanted to get a degree to be able to get more interesting jobs in the future and she was quite tired of her job and her employer at the time. She has also had her own business in Sweden. When she was nine years old, her family moved to Spain and she has stayed abroad several times since then which she thinks has made her a more flexible person that sees moving abroad as something exciting rather than scary.

### 4.6.2 Coming to China

Ellen went to China as an exchange student the first time. During those six months she contacted her previous employer who had an office in Shanghai and was given a project to do. Later in her studies when she was writing her thesis, she again asked her previous employer if she could write it with them and they agreed, so she came to China again. This then led to her being offered a fulltime job with that company in Shanghai. She has now been working in Shanghai for about seven months and combined with her studies, she has about one year of China experience.

She is now on a three year contract and that is how long she plans to stay in China for right now. Accompanying her to China is her Swedish boyfriend who is also on a three year contract with another company. After these three years they will see what happens. Although she loves Sweden and wouldn't mind living there she says that her plans are more international. She claims that she didn't go to China as a planned career move or because it's her dream come true, she just grabbed an opportunity. Whether she will stay in China for more than three years or not depends on her career opportunities and her boyfriend's situation in China three years from now.

### 4.6.3 Career in China

Ellen is quite new in China and has been working for the same Swedish retail company since she arrived. The company has thousands of stores around the world and has been expanding very fast in China during the last three years. Ellen is locally hired in China but has managed to negotiate some benefits like longer vacation, pension and higher salary. She sees her contract as being somewhere between that of an expat and a local. In the beginning her role was heavily focused on analysis of new market projects. It was very detailed and she had to go deep into numbers which she admits is not her strong point. Now her role is more diverse and also includes setting store budgets and coaching them in planning and selling. She is confident that her role will evolve or change further as time goes on: *"That's just the first step. I mean all of my other colleagues; they have all stayed just for a year and then moved on. I'm really new, I've been here just for 6 months. But a lot of things are going on around me."*

She feels that the company is very interested in her career and she sees many opportunities within the company in China: *"I mean they don't want to have an organization where*

*everyone is new all the time. They would rather develop people for the higher positions internally rather than just recruit externally. So I would say that they are very concerned about that.*” However, she explains that one has to fight for it otherwise someone else will take the opportunity. The company is open to suggestions and helps those who show that they want to advance. When she first started, she felt that everyone was expecting her to know the job already and there was no time for training. Eventually she had to speak up: *“I raised my voice and said, I don’t know this, can someone just give me half an hour to show me how to do this? And they did.”*

#### **4.6.4 Career Goals and Needs**

Now Ellen wants to stay in her current position until the end of the year: *“I really want to see my own results. I’ve never been like that before. It’s quite nice to start something and then finish it off, so I told my manager that I don’t want to move to another job within a year.”* Ellen’s ultimate goal is to work with company boards and more strategic issues in the future. She really enjoyed having her own company in the past because of the freedom and being able to use her own competences. Her long term goal with her current employer is to get to something like a country management position: *“[...] where I could be taking care of new markets and take care of the whole deal, open new stores, set up teams and people and these kinds of things.”*

For the longer term she is not sure about staying with her current employer for her whole career. The company values suit her very well and she feels that she has a lot of freedom in her work. However, since she wants to work with strategic issues, she reasons that it will take too long to get there in this company because it is so big and there are so many people who know more than her. She says that she theoretically could stay with this company for the rest of her career but that she doesn’t want to. Ellen values freedom and development highly when evaluating careers: *“I need to be free and I need to feel that I create something and see results all the time. After a while you learn and then it’s not that exciting anymore. Then you need to go forward or upward or sideways or whatever. A good career would be that I always can be developing and I’m also developing others and situations.”* She originally left the same company’s organization in Sweden because she felt there was no room for differing opinions.

Ellen thinks she would be bored if her future career did not entail some kind of international connection: *“I think I would be bored very easily because the culture thing is also very addicting. I mean I always come in with different input than anyone else thought about.”*

#### **4.6.5 Networking and Adjustment**

In her role, Ellen deals with both Chinese and western colleagues on a daily basis. Part of her role in her office is to promote the company’s values of openness and speaking one’s mind and this has created some tension with some of the Chinese colleagues: *“A lot of the local cultural aspects I just... I notice them of course. I mean we have got all the cultural courses and travelled around the world but I still try not to see them. Not to disrespect or to... they are there but I’m not going to listen to that. We have daily, not fights, but daily mini arguments.”*

When she first joined her current team the structure was much more hierarchical and under a Chinese manager: *“He was bossing around. But now, since I just don’t look at those things and try to speak lot more and also my colleagues try to speak their mind. It’s a lot more open-minded and free now, more equal I would say.”* Ellen and the manager in question are formally on the same level but she feels that he has some trouble accepting that.

The company has team building events where Ellen gets the chance to socialize with her colleagues. More spontaneous socializing opportunities are difficult to arrange she says, since her Chinese colleagues all have families. Ellen’s main social life is outside of her work. Her friends in China are mostly foreigners but they are not Swedish. She thinks it is unfortunate that her foreign network is so much stronger than her Chinese network, but in her company they play a more important role for career development since the people she needs to know are mainly foreigners. Ellen has learned some Chinese, enough to get around in town and order food but she would like to improve it a lot. She feels that she has gotten passed the culture shock of coming to a new country: *“I’m passed that now, so now I’m like yeah this is China.”*

#### **4.6.6 Skills and Development**

Ellen says that she has become more humble and understanding during her time working in China. At the same time she is more direct: *“I don’t fuss around, I don’t tiptoe around.”* She explains that she has been a bit of a “loner” in the past and that working in groups is stressful to her because everyone has different ways of working. However, she has realized that she enjoys being a manager because she can have an overview and she does not have to worry so much about details: *“I’m not a detailed oriented person and I’m not the right person for that kind of job. I’m better at managing people than I am doing the actual tasks. I’ve noticed that.”* Ellen has much higher thoughts of herself since coming to work in China because she has realized that she can offer advice to her coworkers that no one has thought of. She really feels that she can add something because of her different perspective.

### **4.7 Mike**

#### **4.7.1 Why China?**

Mike graduated with a master’s in business during the recession time in Finland and Sweden and figured that it would not be very risky to go somewhere else. Asia, and especially China’s longer term opportunities sounded attractive and led him to make his way to China. Initially, the plan was to stay one year but Mike always thought that if he would happen to like it, then he might as well stay longer. After staying in China almost 20 years, the plan is to take it day by day.” *I’m not retiring here if that’s what you are looking for. [...] At some point, I don’t know when, in the next 5, max 10 years, and then I’m probably going to be moving out. Most likely not to Finland, somewhere else”.* The reason is that he does not see any good reason why he should return to Finland while there are many other countries to be explored.

#### 4.7.2 Career in China

Mike said that his real professional career started in China and before that he did not have much experience. Right now, he is involved in four different companies, which are dealing with trade, recruitment, management consultancy and market research and analysis.

Before his present employment, he was involved with setting up many businesses such as Western restaurants in Guangzhou in Western China. After moving to Shanghai in 1998, Mike started to work for a Finnish company where he was promoted two times during the four years he worked there: *“My role was very entrepreneurial because I was the first employee for that particular business line. So I started from the scratch. It was great, the bigger company resources and then I could still pretty much run my own business in China and develop the team and the market”*. He, however, felt that this job was slowly becoming boring, routine and he knew too well what he should be doing. Mike then decided to go back to being self-employed and hence he moved out from Shanghai and focused on trading business for six years. However, partly due to the financial crisis, Mike returned to Shanghai. He describes his career in China: *“It’s been quite a lot of things. Not just like one single company like many of the expatriates, they tend to be working for one single company for many, many years. Maybe in many positions in different locations. Mine is in many different industries and different locations.”*

Mike describes the organization culture of the recruitment company in which he is currently employed being very open and flat. At his position he also has the opportunity to discuss with people that are working in high positions and in much bigger organizations than his. This enables him to learn from other people across the different industries.

#### 4.7.3 Career Goals

When talking about career goals, Mike says he does not really have any. He, however, adds that he is more of a strategic person and therefore would like to be involved in many companies as a partner or on a board level. Due to having grown up in an entrepreneurial family, Mike feels that it suits his personality well: *“Great opportunities, more flexibility, more independent, more freedom”*. He states that even though being in control is very difficult as many things around and within oneself are constantly changing, for him as for many other entrepreneurs, having more control in his work is a significant factor.

#### 4.7.4 Network

When comparing the importance of the foreign and the local, Chinese network, it is evident that the significance depends on the type of business. For Mike, all of the companies that he is involved in have mostly foreign customers. *“However, some other issues, some local issues, it’s definitely good to have some good and strong Chinese connections”*, he admits. From the personal point of view, most of his friends are either Westerners or mixed couples. On the other hand, some of the few Chinese friends that he has known for a long time have become good business partners.

#### 4.7.5 Development and Skills

During his time in China, Mike has learned not only to speak conversational Chinese but he has also learned a lot about himself and that everything is unpredictable and impermanent. He refers to China's rapid growth and different business culture that is much faster than that of Europe's and therefore it is essential that decisions are made faster and with much less information at hand: *"You can't keep on planning and planning and planning like in Europe. [...] I'm sure that some planning is needed but not to the excess that it has been happening right now. You have to start action"*. Mistakes can be corrected on the way. The key is in adaptability and flexibility: *"You have to understand that while there is an opportunity, you have to grab it"*

### 4.8 Eric

#### 4.8.1 Why China?

Originally, Eric came to China to study Chinese language and play floorball at the university. He has now been in the country for four years, which he thinks is the minimum in order to learn the country, its culture and habits. Previously Eric has been working in New York and he has taken a master's degree in Business and Economics in Sweden. He was currently very satisfied with his life and career and China and had at the moment no clear plans on returning home.

#### 4.8.2 Career in China

Eric is currently employed in a big Western company, present in all over the world that provides cultural exchange and language training. He found the job through a friend who suggested the company to him. He was hired through the company office in London meaning that despite not being an expatriate and having the complete compensation package, he has certain benefits including tax deductions. During his career in China, Eric has had several positions within the same company and is currently responsible for managing the development of computer applications. At his current position, he is in daily contact with Chinese people since most of the team members are Chinese. The spirit in the company is good and Eric describes his job being fun. He finds that being a Swede is an advantage as he regularly is in touch with the main office in Europe and its management who are mainly Westerners.

#### 4.8.3 Career Goals

When it comes to Eric's career goals, he would like to have more challenges and travel more. He has also started a small company of his own, which he eventually wants to make his main priority. As for the future plans, Eric says that working outside China is not totally out of question and that it really depends on the company and the job he would be offered. Preferably he would like to keep a connection to China or Asia. He does not have a need to visit home for big holidays such as Christmas or Eastern.

#### 4.8.4 Network, China Knowledge and Skills

According to Eric it is important to learn Chinese if the plan is to stay in the country for a longer period of time. He says he can speak Chinese on a conversational level, which makes it is easier to get a grasp of the Chinese culture when the language barrier is minimized. Also the Chinese network is important as his company is operating in a Chinese market and offering services for the Chinese people.

### 4.9 Carl

#### 4.9.1 Background

Carl is from Finland and in his early thirties. He has a bachelor's degree in Chinese language and culture from a Chinese university and considers himself fluent in Chinese. He has an unfinished education in IT from a Finnish university but has no plans right now to finish that. Before coming to China he worked some part-time jobs, including IT design, but did not have any long term experiences. He is currently married to a Chinese woman.

#### 4.9.2 Coming to China

Carl came to China in 2004 on a student exchange program and studied culture and economics for four months. He had always been interested in Asian culture and knew he wanted to go abroad for one semester and wanted to be sure that he would get the opportunity. He recalls: *"So the options were to go to Japan, and actually to Shanghai also and then this completely new program in a place nobody knows about so I picked that place that nobody knows about as a sure chance."* So it was a strategic choice of him to pick a less known city to avoid competition for the few available spots.

#### 4.9.3 Staying in China

After the four months in China he decided that he wanted to stay longer and found a job teaching English: *"Because studying IT is very boring, and so I wanted to keep a year off so this English teaching job sounded ok so I did that instead for one year."* Carl has since then been an SIE in China on several occasions in different organizations and different positions. Each previous sojourn was ended as the employment that provided him with a visa ended. Currently he has a permanent contract with his employer and now plans to stay for a couple of years and then go somewhere else, maybe Japan, but he has no definite plan. He refers to the convenience of big city life in Shanghai, compared to life back in Finland, as one factor that made him want to stay. He thinks that another reason that led him to stay after those initial four months were also that he was a bit dissatisfied with his career choice back in Finland: *"I've always been interested in this IT stuff but I just didn't want to be like a cubicle slave. So I switched to something completely different."* Now, among reasons that make him consider leaving in a few years are the pollution and food safety issues in China but the main reason is that he is currently dissatisfied with the lack of career development and meaningful tasks in his current job.

Although he plans to stay in China for a few more years he acknowledges that staying in China is dependent on having a job: *"When your contract ends, your residence permit*



*ends, so you have to leave the country or fix it by some other way. So it's easy to get kind of exploited that way."* This makes it difficult to consider oneself an immigrant in China because of the laws regarding visas and residence permits. *"I would consider myself as an immigrant if the local system would allow it. But it doesn't allow... it's kind of absurd. If I had lived 10 years in any other country, I would have gotten my green card but in China it's impossible to get that green card. [...] I'm completely a foreigner to the law's eyes."*

#### 4.9.4 Career in China

As mentioned earlier, Carl's first job in China was as an English teacher. It was a low paid job that took him to some smaller cities in China. He later found a temporary job for a Western governmental organization during a large international exhibition in Shanghai. He originally applied to a project staff or management position but was offered a lower level role instead and accepted. He attributes the fact that he could not get the higher level job to his lack of management and business experience.

He expresses some disappointment over how that job turned out to be. While the project managers and other management staff were AEs with good contracts and good pay, Carl and the other employees were locally hired and received very little pay: *"They were proper expats. Yeah, they were there for the project and the company or the government paid everything, as expats do. And for the rest of us we got like... crumbs from the table (laugh)"*. Carl says that they were also promised that it would be a great opportunity to meet representatives from different companies and that it would be a good way to get a foot in the door with some potential employers. However, he feels that promise was not realized as he saw very few opportunities for himself and his colleagues to network with the right people. Those networking opportunities, he feels were only available to the higher level staff.

His next job in China was for a Chinese company that was working as a subcontractor for a Finnish company. He describes this experience as "interesting" because the culture and management style was completely different: *"The management is layers upon layers. And the lower managers never tell the complete truth to the next one, and it always has to go to the next ones. So the persons who handle the project will also go down through these layers to get something done, so there's... you can't trust nobody."* Carl explains how this hierarchical structure made it difficult to get any changes done or make upper management aware of any problems.

During several months before the end of the project Carl and his Western colleagues were promised that another project would follow but Carl suspects that this was a lie from the beginning: *"They never had any plans to do any kind of new contracts... or maybe they missed out on the new contract with [the company] because they were so screwed up, in their whole handling."* Then near the end of the project the company told the truth, that there would be no more work and then they fired everybody. Although Carl admits that this was handled correctly according to Chinese contract law, his only objection is being lied to: *"So I have... nothing bad to say except that we were lied to. And I had invested and everybody else had invested to go there to Beijing and to move to there to outside the city to this kind of software park... so I wasn't very happy about that, nobody was."*

#### 4.9.5 Current Situation

Now Carl is again working for a western governmental organization, this time a different one, and is now on his second year working there. He describes it as a nine to five job and a stable form of employment but that the job lacks challenges and career progression opportunities: “[...] *some people would think that there is some kind of path to... to get yourself delivered into a higher position, but it’s non-existing. And I’m ok with that for the moment.*” Furthermore he is dissatisfied with the salary he gets for this job. He still thinks the job is kind of interesting and he likes the team he is working in.

However, similarly to the last time he worked for a western governmental organization, he sees clear differences between how the SIEs hired on local contracts and the AEs are treated: “*It’s a completely different bunch of people. We have the [AEs], they get the whole expat package again from the government, so they get really crazy bonuses and apartments that cost like 30 000 RMB per month, and my salary is half than that, and I get no benefits.*”

Carl’s current plan is to stay with this organization for a couple of years but this is mainly due to lack of options. He says that he could probably stay at this job for ten more years if he wanted to but he does not want to. One of the reasons for this is that there is no way to make a career out of this job, since the organization does not provide any opportunity for locally hired employees to advance. Lack of benefits and being treated so differently from the AEs are other negative aspects of being locally hired according to Carl.

#### 4.9.6 Skills and Development

Although none of Carl’s employers in China has provided him with much training aimed at supporting his personal and career development he has still developed skills and career capital by himself. The most obvious thing he points out is his Chinese language skills that have developed through his studies and through living and working in China to the point that he is now fluent in Chinese. Furthermore his understanding of China and Chinese people is something he argues would be valuable for businesses. In his current organization he acts as a mediator between the westerners and the Chinese as he can communicate unhindered and understands the culture of both sides.

He further argues that many AEs who come to China to manage Chinese employees are not the best suited for the task: “*I mean in several cases I would be a much better boss than them because they lack the cultural understanding.*”

#### 4.9.7 Networking and Adjustment

Carl’s social network consists mainly of other SIEs at his job and some Chinese friends from outside of work. He sees that his current workplace is divided into three social groups: “[...] *it’s really divided into Chinese have their thing, and the locally hired [SIEs] we have our things and the rest they have their champagnes.*” Among his colleagues the AEs are the only ones he does not spend time with outside of work and attributes this to their different lifestyles: “*Yeah because they have completely different lifestyles of champagne brunches and whatever.*”

Carl does not go to many of the expat networking events in Shanghai since he feels they are very expensive and he sees them as pointless for him. He instead prefers events that are for foreigners but not aimed at expats and that has a point other than networking. He realizes that going to these networking events could be good for his career by giving him a chance to meet the right people but he is not interested in doing that too often. He prefers having local friends over getting stuck in the “expat bubble”:

*“I understand that for an expat who is living in the so-called expat bubble [...] they would need more local network because they are in their bubble and they don’t get to experience the real stuff. I can see that, for the expats, that they are just in their bubble. They are living in Minhang or Gubei or wherever they are and they just have mainly foreign friends, also expats, so they have something in common and I can understand that but they don’t get out of it enough.”*

#### **4.9.8 Career Goals and Needs**

Although he is considering finding a new job within a few years, he wants to keep his Chinese or international connection in his future career: *“I mean most of my friends and colleagues and so on... have always been from all over the world so if I would have to go back to Finland in a Finnish company with all Finnish colleagues, it wouldn’t be... I don’t know, maybe boring is the right word. I wouldn’t get enough out of it.”* Carl will consider his career successful if he can get some kind of managerial position and have some power in an organization: *“It doesn’t have to be so high, but then I would see that somebody appreciates all the experience and knowledge that I have.”*

Although he admits that an expat contract would be nice, he does not feel like he needs it and would not want to sacrifice his more down to earth connection to China and his relationships with local friends: *“I rather have some local friends, I cannot see myself living in an expat bubble, if that’s the price. If you get an expat contract and then you are stuck in that bubble. I don’t want that either.”*

### **4.10 Matt**

#### **4.10.1 Why China?**

Matt graduated from a business school in Finland in 1996 and has since then been working in asset management, finance and stock broking in several organizations. His big plan was to first do his MBA in the USA and then reside there permanently. While in the USA, he however, figured that in order to develop himself in the best way possible, it would be best if he headed to China: *“The future is there and when I, so to speak, grow up and become 40 and 50, the competitive advantage that I have in business with all the Chinese network, and business skills and language, is going to be very unique in my own age group [...] so I wanted to leverage China in the long term [...]”*. His attitude was to stay for a long period of time but he does not intend to retire in China. *“I’m just a Viking from the North Europe who is here because it’s good for business”*.

#### 4.10.2 Carrier in China

After taking the decision to move, Matt packed his bags and rented a small apartment in Hong Kong: *"I went to the company registry and I invested 2000 dollars to setting up my own company. It was not a shareholding company; it was only like a company name [...] It was the cheapest possible way to start a business"*. After attending several networking events, Matt found his first client and worked for them during three years where his task was to help on restructuring the enterprise before it was to be sold. The project gave him so much money that he was able to survive for half a year before the next client turned up and he gradually stabilized his business. He later went on to start other businesses as well: *"I've had 30 projects in 10 different industries in 10 countries. In average, 3 projects per year. It's everything from health care, food and beverage, investment banking, private wealth management, manufacturing, branding, many things"*.

Matt has had several partnerships with other businesses, some of which are now taken care of by his wife. He explains his current employment situation: *"I'm a contractual general manager, which I have been also in my past ten years. It's a business contract where I take over a general manager position and develop the businesses for a while"*. This means that he is self-employed but at the same time in a way hired to manage another business. He really enjoys his current position in a big HR company as he feels that it is the last skill he needs to know for the next 25 years.

#### 4.10.3 Career Goals

When talking about the future, Matt is certain that he will be somehow involved in the field of investment: *"Like a tiger has its stripes, you can't get rid of it, so I'm going back to that business in some years. So that's my future"*. He has a big interest in working with venture capital and private equity as Matt sees himself more as practical than financial investor and believes that managing listed companies would make him bored: *"I need to optimize my skills and match with the value I've created and venture capital and private equity is where I want to be"*.

Returning back to Finland is something that he considers almost impossible but Matt does not rule out the option of being employed by a big Finnish company as their representative in China: *"I could go back to Finland or Stockholm for 2 years starting some big international company's China operations. But only for 2 years"*. Also, working in some other country is not completely out of the question, though, only if the position would provide him enough career growth and long term value. He, however, reveals his career goal, big dream, being an owner of a successful investment fund.

At the time of the interview, Matt has not been in Finland for three years and he admits that he is not satisfied with that at the moment. However, he does not necessary have a need to go back there for holidays or summer since he feels that his current home is in China.

#### 4.10.4 Skills and Development

When it comes to personal and professional development, Matt thinks that for him, it has been more diverse, challenging and faster compared to if he had stayed in Finland or in the USA. He believes the experience in China has made him ten times smarter than what he

would be without it.” *So, professionally, I’m much smarter with a lot more emotional intelligence, social awareness... I have much more pragmatic business skills than I would have if I had not been here because I have to do everything by myself here*“. As a practical example, he names client relationship management being an important one as business in China is a lot more related to relationships than anywhere else. *“It doesn’t matter if you have a PhD in Stanford or if you are just a smart guy from the meat market but of course the best solution is that if you have a PhD from Stanford or Umeå and you have the relationships. Then you are a real superman or a superwoman”*

Matt also mentions that he is much better with people nowadays, which means that he has developed his skills to communicate socially, emotionally and business wise with people from different parts of the world. This kind of cross-cultural intelligence, Matt believes, is what gives him his competitive advantage and the reason why he is being hired: *“I would say that the main point is that your worldview changes a lot. Because if you don’t understand China in the future, you will miss out on the biggest economic market in the history of humankind.”* He says that his biggest challenge in the beginning was to become sustainably profitable and have a stable income, which was related not only to him not knowing anything about China but also the Westerners not understanding the importance of establishing their presence in China: *“That’s a big challenge because it’s affecting my business; the less they know, the less they are gonna use my service”*.

#### 4.10.5 Network

Matt says that he is very good at networking and he tries to go to every event possible and exchange business cards with as many as he can. He further believes that the Chinese relationships are much more important already now and in the future: *“To have foreign relationships that’s like thousands who have the same but to have those Chinese investment fund relationships, are very, very rare. That’s exactly my competitive advantage. Based on those relationships, I will open up my private equity fund. It’s the Chinese who I’m going to work with, not the foreigners. They are everything.”* Otherwise his circle of friends consists mainly of foreigners. With his colleagues, he hardly spends any time. He says that this is due to the fact that his free time is very limited and it goes mainly taking care of the family. With the coworkers, the conversation also very often trails towards work-related issues.

#### 4.10.6 China Knowledge

In terms of China specific knowledge, Matt highlights that the majority of the problems faced by the Western companies are related to the cultural issues even to the extent that the Western CEOs tend to speak about a “wall of problems” instead of having just “a problem”. The tension is rooted in the fact that due to the lack of cultural intelligence, the everyday issues are difficult to transfer and explain to the headquarters, located outside China. However, according to Matt, those Western companies that are able to adapt themselves and become Chinese faster will win the game in the end. Another thing that he emphasizes being specific to the Chinese business environment as an entrepreneur, is the need to diversify oneself and being simultaneously involved in several different businesses: *“China is very fast moving economy where you can lose your client in one minute. They just call you and say that the business is off, and that’s it. And even if you have a contract, the contracts are not honored. Don’t bother to go to the court”*.

## 4.11 Dan

### 4.11.1 Why China?

Dan is from Sweden and in his late twenties. Dan's initial plan was to go to China for one year after finishing high school. He wanted to challenge himself and therefore learning Chinese in China sounded perfect. The studies in Beijing went so well that Dan decided to find a job and stay another year. At the present time, Dan has been in China for about 10 years: *"Mainly because China is still changing so fast and there are so many interesting things happening, so many new opportunities happening here and there. So, yeah it's exciting and no one really knows what's going to happen in China. I mean if you compare to Sweden, Sweden is a very stable society. Even when we change the ruling party the changes are not that significant. You know, changes a little bit around the edges. But in china, things can just sway back and forth very quickly"*. However, he believes that when the time comes to start a family, then he will most likely move back to Sweden since family care and education is better, the air is clean, food is safe to eat and nature is easily accessible there.

### 4.11.2 Career in China

During his time in China, Dan has been employed for multiple companies. In the beginning he was hired as a model and did a few commercials. After that his friend suggested him to try a job as an English teacher for a few English language institutions. Parallel to teaching English a couple of times a week during a period of about 6 months, he also did some English and Swedish proofreading and translations if there happened to be some Swedish journalists that needed help in interpreting Chinese for example.

Next in line, was a job as a tour leader for Swedish tourists coming to China. It was a fulltime job and he was hired by a Swedish company as a local employee. Dan describes the work as easy and that the contact with the colleagues due to the language barrier was limited: *"I mean they saw from all the feedback that I got from the tourists that I was doing a good job so they were like 'OK' and... so all the contact we had... they were saying 'we're going to have a group at this time, can you take it?' and I would say yes, and they would send me all the info and I would just go and take that group, very simple"*. After a while, Dan felt a need to educate himself but did not want to return to Sweden. He had realized how few foreigners could speak Mandarin and therefore he decided to improve his current level and study for a bachelor's degree in Chinese: *"I found a program [...] so I applied to that and then they had a special course you could take as a foreigner, so you took one year of preparatory studies"*. Simultaneously with his studies, Dan occasionally did some tour leading for different firms and also interpretation jobs for smaller Swedish companies whenever it would not collide with his studies. He has also been involved in a Swedish government organization that organizes seminars and other events where he held senior positions for a few years and still has an important role. He also mentioned that he has run a website as a small side project which aimed at providing information about studying in China for Swedish people.

Dan is today fluent in mandarin and has a bachelor's degree in Chinese from a Chinese university. After graduation he started his current work for a PR and communications

company where he has had the current job for little over two years at the moment. The company has four offices in China and Dan's career began in a Beijing office but he was later offered to move to Shanghai, which is the biggest office with about one hundred employees. The biggest challenge at his current position is to exercise authority over people who he has no formal power over. This is due to the fact that officially he does not have the mandate and the title to give people orders but it is still his job to make sure that the senior management's ideas are executed: *"If you have an assistant title, that's not going to give you mandate. It's actually good also in one way because if you would have that title then people would see you more as a threat"*. As he does not have the title, the employees act more casual around him. The company is now undergoing big changes and Dan says that he has been moved to take care of less interesting tasks and therefore he is not very satisfied with his situation and is now looking for some other options as well. He plans to study for a master's degree online from China at a Swedish university in the near future.

#### 4.11.3 Career Goals

When it comes to career goals, Dan says he wants to be international, keep challenging himself and learn new things: *"I think there would be too few unknowns working at ICA as a cashier"*. He liked working for the Swedish government organization since he had a chance to build his social networks and organize all the events. When he got his current job, a lot of things were chaotic due to a recent merger and so a challenge was constructing a new company culture. At the time of the interview, Dan is in the process formulating the direction of his future career and thinking about the next steps, which could be either with his current employer but could as well be with some other company that needs help to settle in the China market: *"My recent goal is that I want to spend more time working on sustainability related things"*. Right now, Dan feels that his organization is not helping him to reach that goal: *"Maybe I'm not asking them to, because I'm not sure if it's something they are interested in. Maybe they are, maybe I should talk to them more"*. He means that the organization culture is shaped in a way that asks of the individual to be proactive. In a similar way, development is available for those who takes the initiative and asks for it: *"They are always listening to if you have ideas on how you develop and what you want to do, yeah for sure"*.

#### 4.11.4 Network

Dan places a high value on networking and explains that most of the opportunities, including the opportunity he has now, he has found through his networks. The current boss he had met a couple of times before while having his previous job and knowing a little bit about each other was something he found very helpful. When talking about the relationship between him and his colleagues, Dan divides them into the Chinese and the foreigners. He says he spends more time with building his Chinese network as well as with his Chinese colleagues since him knowing Chinese makes the communication much easier as the Chinese people prefer speaking their own language. The non-Chinese speaking foreigners, in turn, have more of an expat feeling and do mostly what expats do; go out to nice foreign restaurants. *"Even if you don't want to spend your time learning Chinese, you have to spend time with Chinese people [...] You have to understand what they are doing and why they are different and how are they the same and all of these things. So if you come to China,*

*don't just stay in the expat bubble. That's not going to help you. You have to get out of your comfort zone. That's why you are in China from the start."*

#### **4.11.5 Expats vs. SIEs**

Dan believes that people who found their jobs locally are in some ways better suited to work in China since these people are more aware of what is happening around them and in China in general. That's how they got the job in the first place. However, many of these people, according to him, tend to feel a little undervalued by their organizations because the companies might not really be responsive to these things that these persons can see.

#### **4.11.6 Skills and Development**

In terms of his personal development, Dan says that he has become much better with time management and driving projects. Senior management does not have the time to follow up and track the process but instead they have coordinated that to Dan, who also can interact better with Chinese who are also the majority of the employees. These skills he learned through personal coaching by the senior management but also during his time at the Swedish governmental organization where he was a responsible for organizing many events and projects.

Another prominent skill is being proficient in Chinese and speaking it fluently which has also helped him to better understand the culture and how and why certain things are as they are: *"I see a lot of foreign senior people that speak a little bit of Chinese. That helps a little bit in one way, socially, like: I speak a little bit Chinese, and it's kind of fun and they can engage a little bit with Chinese people but its only useful in a social way. I mean in business, if you do that it will probably be more harmful than do any good."* He also takes up language as a means of power meaning that the Chinese people having a limited English proficiency also affects the persuading skills that they are able to use when doing business. With almost 10 years' experience, Dan has seen how a lot of people come to China only to get confused by the people: *"I mean they can be very social and nice and all of that but that's just for being social. For them when it's business, then its business and its very clear cut [...] The expats who are sent here, they usually need quite some time to understand this"*. He adds being social and creating trust is the first step, and something typical to the culture which cannot be skipped. However, when it goes into business, then it's very much business and nothing more.

*"My strength will always be connected to China. Even if I don't live in China in the future, my strength will be my Chinese understanding and Chinese connections"*.



#### 4.12 Organizational Commitment Measurement Questions

To be able to better compare the participants commitment to their organizations, we performed a list of control questions designed by Allen & Meyer (1990, pp. 6-7) along with the interviews. The 24 questions are divided according to the three different types of organizational commitment, namely AC, CC and NC, as presented in the theory chapter. Each question consisted of a statement that the interviewee had to give an answer in a Likert scale from 1 to 7, 1 indicating strong disagreement while the 7 indicated a strong agreement. The results were calculated category wise by adding up the numbers together in that particular category and then dividing the total by the number of the questions in each category. In this way, we got the mean result in each category for every participant, which were interpreted in the way that closer the acquired number was to one, the lower the participant's commitment in that particular category was. In a similar manner, the closer the number was to 7, the higher the participant's commitment in that category was. The results of the calculations are shown on the Table 2.

	Affective Commitment (AC)	Continuance Commitment (CC)	Normative Commitment (NC)
Alfred	<b>5,6</b>	3,1	2,6
Pablo	5,1	3,3	<b>4,5</b>
Sophie*	3,5	3,5	3,5
Ben	<b>1,6</b>	<b>5</b>	3,4
Ellen	4,3	3,6	2,9
Mike	5,5	3,1	3,8
Eric	4,1	3,8	3,3
Carl	3	4,8	2,8
Matt	5	4,1	<b>1,3</b>
Dan	3,9	<b>2,8</b>	3

**Table 2: Organizational Commitment Scores**

\* As Sophie was currently unemployed we asked her to answer with her feelings towards her previous employer before she quit in mind.

## 5 Discussion

*In this chapter, the empirical findings will be analyzed in connection with the theoretical framework and the purpose of the study.*

### 5.1 The Definition of an SIE

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, there have been some disagreements on how to define an SIE in the previous literature. In this study, the criterion for selection of the respondents were that they should have gone to China on their own initiative, that they held at least a bachelor degree and that they either had or were looking for a regular employment. The fourth criterion suggested by Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1289), intention of temporary stay, was omitted as we wanted to have the possibility of also including both individuals who have made the transition from temporary intention to a more permanent intention and those that may have less definite plans regarding the duration of their stay.

#### 5.1.1 Intention of Temporary Stay

Looking at our sample, we can see that some of the participants in this study expressed less than definite plans regarding the duration of their stay. Alfred came to China with a “for now” mindset and while he is not opposed to referring to himself as an immigrant, he was looking for alternatives to living in China and did not consider himself very permanently rooted in China, at least not physically. Mike came with the intention to stay for one year but ended up staying for almost twenty years. Similarly to Alfred, Mike expressed a “day by day” attitude but had a vague horizon of five to ten years when he “probably” would go somewhere else. Eric had also come to study for shorter period and by chance found a good career opportunity and four years later he was happy with his situation and had no immediate plans to leave. Matt, although coming to China with a long term perspective, did not consider himself a permanent immigrant and rather referred to himself as a modern day Viking who is in China because it is good for business. Dan had no set plan for returning home but he believed that if he were to start a family, it would trigger a return to Sweden. Pablo had a long term intention to stay in China although he had only been there for three years so far. His involvement in two growing entrepreneurial ventures likely contributed to him having a long term perspective in China. None of the participants intended to retire in China.

Whether these six individuals can be said to have an intention of temporary stay becomes a matter of degree of temporariness. Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1295) argue that those who employ this criteria should be ready to set the boundaries between temporary and permanent intentions. They suggest that screening questions for determining intention of temporary stay should include: “Was it your original intention to repatriate after a certain time?” and “Do you still intend to return to your home country within the coming months or years?” (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014, p. 1269). These questions would then exclude people like Alfred, Pablo, Matt and Sophie from SIE status since they came to China with a rather unclear intention of when they would return. Time of return, for them, depended on what happened in China. Furthermore, these individuals would have been considered SIEs in much of the previous research in the field including that of, Inkson et al. (1997) and Suutari and Brewster (2000).

We believe that a criterion for intention of temporary stay is necessary to distinguish SIEs from immigrants but we also believe that the interpretation of temporary by Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1296) is too constricting and places unrealistic demands on SIEs in terms of medium to long term planning of their futures. We see the river metaphor suggested by Crowley-Henry (2012, p. 139) for understanding SIEs career development as highly relevant in this context. SIEs career path and intention to stay in the host country is strongly influenced by external factors in the form of obstacles and opportunities. We suggest that the distinction between SIEs and immigrants should be focused more on that SIEs are in a country to work and do not intend to stay forever while immigrants intend to stay regardless of their job situation and have more permanent intentions. Furthermore, although only a few of our participants problematized the regulatory and societal obstacles present in China to them being granted official status as long term residents, we still believe that individuals should have more extensive rights to remain in the host country, than what is the case for most foreigners in China today, before they can be considered immigrants. If a system or society does not allow someone to be considered a permanent resident, and their legal right to stay is dependent on their fortune on the labor market, we find it problematic to classify them as immigrants even if they intend to *try* to stay for a very long time.

We argue that there is a danger that a strict application of the criterion of intention of temporary stay, included in Cerdin and Selmer's (2014, p. 1293) definition will result in SIEs as a group having an overrepresentation of individuals who have (1) failed to adapt to life in the host country and/or (2) have failed to become successful in the host country. Indications of this can be seen in our empirical findings. What Alfred, Mike, Matt, Eric, Dan and Pablo have in common apart from their more vaguely defined or long term intentions to stay is that they had very positive experiences and future expectations of their careers in China. They had succeeded as entrepreneurs or found challenging roles in organizations and were confident in their ability to find more opportunities in China in the future.

The participants who had the most clearly articulated plans to return home or at least leave China were Carl, Sophie and Ben. Carl had been an SIE on multiple occasions since his initial adventure as a student and English teacher in China. Each time his repatriation was due to that his employment ended and that he did not have any other sufficiently satisfying opportunities to pursue at the time. Now he had a permanent employment contract but was dissatisfied with the lack of challenges and development possibilities and was therefore planning to stay a few more years and try to find a better job, if that failed he planned to leave. Sophie was among those who came to China with the idea that she would try it for a time and then ended up staying because of the opportunities she found. She also referred to the challenging atmosphere in Shanghai as something very positive. She was now preparing to return to France since she was currently out of a job and her visa was running out. She was hoping to find something that would allow her to stay for a year or two more but did not feel very optimistic with less than 2 months left on her visa. She did, in any case, want to return to France or at least Europe in the future and stated that an important reason was that her friends and family missed her and wanted her to come back. Ben also came to China with a short time period in mind but because he adjusted well to life in Shanghai, found employment and had some interesting opportunities, he ended up staying significantly longer. Recently however, he had begun to consider returning home since he

felt that his career had come to a standstill. He was to give it another year and go home if no better opportunities came up.

Ellen was still very new in China, having been there for less than a year, and she currently planned to stay for three years and then reevaluate the situation together with her boyfriend. Although the current time horizon was three years, she was not sure what would happen after those three years. That depended on her opportunities and her boyfriend's situation three years from now. For Carl, Sophie and Ben, their plans to leave China were clearly connected to their dissatisfaction with their current job situation in China. Sophie also exhibited lower host country embeddedness in the form of less developed language skills and few Chinese friends and she also exhibited stronger home country embeddedness in the form of friends and family asking her to come back. Lo et al. (2012, p. 4226) found that embeddedness in the host country organization can reduce pressure to quit that may result from strong home country embeddedness.

This means that the participants in our study who best fit the definition of SIE suggested by Cerdin and Selmer (2014, p. 1293), do so because they are either dissatisfied with their career progression and in Sophie's case, also because she is experiencing home country pull factors and a lower level of embeddedness in the host country. Thus we argue that this definition might not be suitable for defining SIEs. At the very least, care should be taken when applying it to the Chinese context because it may give a misleading image of SIEs and we argue that the boundary between temporary and permanent intention should allow for longer periods of stay and also for more vaguely formulated plans of return. Based on this, we argue that all of our participants should be regarded as SIEs in this context.

## **5.2 Career Goals and Needs**

As part of the purpose of this thesis is to develop recommendations to organization on how to retain SIEs we will now analyze our participants' career stories in the view of theories related to career goals and needs which we believe are vital to understanding how to keep SIEs committed to their organizations.

### **5.2.1 Boundaryless and Protean Career**

After performing the interviews, it was clear that most of the participants had been working for several companies during their careers in China. The ones who had not been employed for any other companies besides the ones they were currently working for, namely Eric and Ellen, had also been in China for a relatively short period of time; Ellen only about a year. Eric, despite being employed by the same organization, had gone through several promotions and thus his assignments within the same corporation had varied. Sophie, in turn, had experienced several different jobs under only 18 months. Matt, Mike and Pablo are currently self-employed and Eric has an own business on the side of his full time job.

Many participants expressed the reasons for frequent job changes were due to them wanting more challenging tasks, as they felt that gradually their jobs were getting routine and boring, which hindered their professional development. Sophie and Carl saw their companies' weak career climbing possibilities being problematic while Dan described his

current tasks as uninteresting, which had made him consider other options outside his organization. The most dissatisfied interviewees were Ben and Carl who were the only ones having experience in working for a Chinese company under a local contract. They had a hard time adjusting to and agreeing with the hierarchical leadership style, limited learning possibilities as well as with the non-existing career ladder possibilities. Sophie, Pablo, Ben, Dan and Ellen had faced some issues when it comes to getting training at their companies. Pablo and Dan expressed the need for being proactive and asking for it while Sophie was left alone to handle opening a new office. None of the participants really complained about the need to be proactive in order to get training and support but rather took it as a learning opportunity. However, Ben and Carl saw no development possibilities regardless of how proactive they tried to be.

Our findings can be somewhat explained by what has been seen in previous studies about the SIEs being engaged in boundaryless and protean careers. The reason for this kind of behavior is that the SIEs see their personal development as a main goal; they want to learn and challenge themselves (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179; Briscoe et al., 2006, p. 3). Pablo, Sophie and Mike were all recent graduates in their home countries and they saw China as a good start for their careers and a way to enhance their competitive advantage in the labor market. They all believed themselves having had a chance to perform more advanced tasks compared to those that they would have been given back in Europe. Pablo also mentioned that the reason for him choosing to be self-employed is the fact that he wants to do meaningful work and not just earn money, which is typical for people with a protean career attitude (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, p. 288). Similar interpretations was done by Jokinen et al. (2008, p. 990), who in their study found that graduates considered going abroad as an SIE as a means to develop their career capital faster.

Another finding is that it is evident that our results follow the propositions by Rodriguez and Scurry (2014, p. 204) and Inkson et al. (1997) about SIEs not being professional planners but rather grabbing the opportunity when they see it. Matt, who initially had planned to live his life in the USA, saw an opportunity in China and therefore changed his career plans. Pablo was offered an internship in China which led him there. In a similar way, Ellen describes that going to China was not a dream come true but rather something that just happened. Crowley-Henry (2012, p. 134, 136, 138) state that there are many external incidences of which the individual has no control over and that SIEs are particularly good at adapting themselves to the present conditions. An example of this, is how during the economic recession in Europe, Sophie, Pablo and Mike made their way to China where getting a job was much easier. The only exception to this is Alfred, who intentionally declined taking jobs in order to be ready to leave for China when this kind of opportunity was given to his wife.

We can interpret the boundaryless career behavior among our participants being an outcome of the organizations failing to provide these SIEs with interesting and challenging tasks and actually listening to what these people want as well as showing a continued interest in their performance. Unlike AEs who are used to high salaries, great benefits and luxurious lifestyle, the SIEs' main objective seems to be career growth. However, smaller organizations with limited operations either geographically or product/service wise, may find it tricky to provide enough stimulus to this group of people in the long run. Larger

companies might fare better as can be seen in the cases of Ellen and Eric, who are employed by big, global organizations. They mentioned that they could theoretically spend the rest of their lives with the same company since the intracompany opportunities are abundant and being international is important for them.

### 5.2.2 Job Satisfaction and Adjustment

When it comes to job satisfaction, Ellen and Eric mentioned that the organizations showed interest in developing their careers while the contrary was true for Ben and Dan who had lower level jobs in a Chinese company. Furthermore, Ben and Dan were also working under a Chinese manager and showed some dissatisfaction while Ellen and Eric, who were working under Western management team, felt that the communication was not an issue and they understood each other well. Dan said that he had previously been working under a Western manager and now when that person was about to leave the organization, Dan had also began to think about alternatives: *"You don't leave companies, you leave bosses, right?"*. Carl, who also had some prior experience in working for a Chinese company, was dissatisfied with the management's dishonesty regarding his project team's contract as well as tired of the hierarchy which hindered effective communication between them and the management. These findings are in line with the study by Froese & Peltokorpi (2012, p. 1964) to the extent where the lower job satisfaction is associated with SIEs having host country managers. However, nothing can be said about the extent to which the nationality of the employed organization might have affected since none of the interviewees were hired by a Western company where they would have been working under a Chinese supervisor.

Even though Dan, Ben and Carl have not had a smooth career path and acknowledge the fact that they career wise have not had the chance to advance, they still chose to stay with the organization for the time being and remain in China. This can be linked to the findings of Crowley-Henry (2007, pp. 57-58) about the locally hired expatriates staying in the host country despite it not being valuable for their career growth. The same author further states that this indicates that there must be some other factors that make these people stay (Crowley-Henry, 2007, p. 58). From our findings, it can be said that the reasons for Dan, Ben and Carl staying in China reflect them having had a strong interest towards the country from the beginning, which had left them learning the language fluently and thus being highly adjusted to the Chinese culture. Froese & Peltokorpi, (2012, p. 1964) talk about SIEs having a higher interaction adjustment while another study by Lo et al. (2012, p. 4225) call it host country embeddedness. The host country embeddedness seemed to be especially strong among these individuals since even though they all faced some negative events (losing jobs) and were required to return home due to them not having the visa for a legal stay, they all actively pursued finding a way to stay China for the time being. This embeddedness in the host country can also explain the nature of their commitment to their organization as will be discussed more in depth later in this analysis. Ben and Carl expressed significantly stronger indications of continuance commitment (CC) to their current employers.

Consistent with our view, that companies are reluctant to hire SIEs, these people had experienced problems regarding finding employment in Western organizations in China. Carl, currently employed for a Western governmental organization, explains that all the

higher-level positions are given to AEs. The reason for this can be that companies believe that sending AEs are somewhat a safer choice because these expats are already familiar with the company culture and their competences are known (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010, p. 29). They might also fear SIEs not being loyal or suspect that without a higher education from a Western institution or experience in Western companies, these types of SIEs are not qualified for the work. Nevertheless, our findings reinforce the view that while this can be true, the SIEs can ultimately possess stronger understanding of the host country environment, especially when it comes to dealing with Chinese nationals, due to their language skills, and therefore investing in an SIE could be an alternative. According to our empirical results, the SIEs are in China to leverage it for the long term and hence could provide a company with a more cost effective solution. These findings support Tharenou's (2013, p. 350) conceptual contributions regarding SIEs as valuable because of their potential for reducing cultural friction. Carl's story is a good example of this as he has taken on a mediating role between the cultural groups in his current organization.

Job satisfaction is also linked to host location attractiveness, meaning that individuals with interest in the host destination have greater job satisfaction and level of adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009, p. 1107). Alfred, Mike, Matt and Pablo, who are all currently self-employed, report leaving for China due to the growing business opportunities. Sophie explained that for her, China is more about challenge than monetary benefits. Ellen said that she did not mind having long days at work not only because she found her tasks interesting but also because her peers, mainly other foreigners, were doing the same and therefore being busy seemed to be a part of the city's atmosphere.

### 5.2.3 Career Anchors

A surprising find was that quite a few of the interviewed SIEs had set up their own companies and were either currently self-employed or had a small business on the side. Mike, Matt and Alfred were involved in more than one business simultaneously. Also, the ones who were employed at the moment, showed an interest towards entrepreneurship and having an own company in the future. This could be explained by the need for freedom and the need for being in control of one's career, which were important factors for the interviewees' when evaluating jobs. Alfred and Mike both said that they were not interested in working for organizations. Alfred expressed that it involved too much compromising and reporting upwards. It is also possible that entrepreneurship provides a way to find meaningful work and thus fulfill the goal of self-achievement. According to a study of SIEs' career anchors, the concept defined by Schein (1996, p.80) and Suutari and Taka (2004), meaning elements that the individual is not willing to give up even if faced a hard decision, the most important one was the balance between work and family while the need for security was more uncommon (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297). Being an entrepreneur is apparently a way to achieve this freedom and exercise more control over one's life. Mike mentioned that in a company setting, one easily has a false sense of security even though the game could easily change very fast leading to sudden layoffs and he believed that SIEs place a lower value on this perceived security than others.

It seems that in the Chinese context it is necessary to be engaged in multiple businesses since the everyday situations are rapidly changing. According to Matt it is not very unusual

for Chinese clients to call off deals without warning or not honoring contracts. Being a multiple entrepreneur could therefore offset this risk. Alfred argues however, that most SIEs, including himself, are extreme risk takers. Similarly, Sophie is keen on having a risky position. The explanation here can be that since all the interviewees acknowledge China being a challenging destination, the individuals who make the decision to go there and also remain there for longer term are more risk tolerant on average. Opening up an own company in this turbulent environment requires one being comfortable in uncomfortable situations. Due to this risky environment, entrepreneurship in the form of multiple businesses can be a way to adjust to and minimize the risk of being left with nothing in case of negative occurrences. When it comes to the second anchor (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297), we cannot however, say much as the majority of the participants did not have a family. Those who did mentioned that they had less time to see their friends since they wanted to spend some of the limited time with the family.

Being international was also brought up by the majority of the participants as a career goal or part of their current identity. Internationalization has also been found to be one of the important career anchors among SIEs (Cerdin & Pargeneux, 2010, pp. 296-297; Suutari and Brewster, 2000, p. 419). Matt said that returning to Finland for good would be impossible for him and working without international ties was not something that the rest of the interviewees would like to do either. Sophie, Alfred and Ellen wanted to keep the Asia connection and in case of returning, Ben and Carl would consider being consultants for Western companies entering China. In their study, Richardson and McKenna (2002, pp. 70-72) discovered that an important reason for why expats go abroad was the ability to use the experience in their career development. We believe that since the individuals have invested a considerable amount of time and energy in China, it is natural that they want to utilize this accumulated knowledge in the future.

### **5.3 Organizational Commitment**

The concept of underemployment and the fulfillment of the individual's psychological contract has effects on the overall organizational commitment Lee (2005, pp.183-184). Underemployment is an issue when an individual does not feel that he/she can perform at his/her full potential Lee (2005, pp.183-184). This is related to what has been described above about the interviewed SIEs needs for having freedom, learning opportunities and challenging tasks, which further has effects on the individual's job satisfaction. This indicates that the reasons for the turnovers have been the same as what Maynard, Joseph and Maynard (2006, pp. 529-530) found in their study of SIEs in Singapore.

As stated previously, we asked a number of control questions to measure the participants' organizational commitment (OC) and the extent to which the participants had emotional, normative and continuous commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990, pp. 2-3). The results of these questions are presented in Table 2. When looking at the results, it is possible to see that affirmative commitment (AC) was highest for Mike, Alfred, Matt and Pablo, who all scored close to 5, meaning that these people felt the most emotionally attached to their companies among our participants. This is not surprising since they are all entrepreneurs and are thus personally invested in the company. These individuals are also most likely doing the kind of job they really feel passionate about and are most satisfied with. The



lowest AC levels were among Ben and Carl, scoring 1.6 and 3 respectively. Their low emotional attachment to the companies can be explained by them being employed by organizations where the career advancement possibilities are poor and where the management does not show interest in their employees' long term career plans. Sophie, although currently unemployed was asked to answer the questions with her former employer in mind and how she felt towards the end of her employment. Sophie ranked in the middle in each category with the score 3.5, and explained being very satisfied with her company in the beginning when she had autonomy in her work, a challenging and developing task and at the same time felt that the management was interested in what she was doing. However, her feelings changed along the way as the job became routine and she started to feel distant from the top management as they did not seem to care what she did. She would have liked to have more demanding assignments as well as possibility for career development.

When it comes to analyzing the continuance commitment (CC) of our participants, we can see that Ben scored 5, which is the highest among all of the participants. We interpret this to mean that he feels being the most dependent on his current employment and that quitting would be highly costly. This is not only related to the economic costs but also especially true in China where Ben's legal stay is attached to his working visa, so remaining employed for this organization is sort of the only option that he has right now because he does not have anything else lined up at the moment. Carl's CC score of 4.8 similarly echoes his statements that he stayed mainly because of lack of alternatives and because of the costs of leaving. This indicates that perceived costs and risks of leaving an organization can make SIEs stay longer in an organization but that this may not necessarily be a good thing since their AC and thus their motivation may be low.

As discussed above Ben and Carl also scored low on AC. The lowest score of 2.8 in CC, belongs to Dan, who has positive feelings about his future and is certain that finding another job would not be a problem. This is thanks to his large network through which he has found almost all of his previous jobs including his present employment and the competencies he has developed in China. The individuals ranking in the middle with the scores around 3, are the entrepreneurs Alfred, Mike and Pablo, where Matt is the only exception with a score of 4.1. The middle results make sense since having invested time and money in their own projects, leaving the organization would imply losses that are higher than that of Dan's who is only employed and thus does not have the financial and personal attachment. The reason for the scores being lower than that of Ben's are also understandable since these self-employed are involved in more than one business and thus the spread of risk mean that they do not have all eggs in one basket so to speak.

As for the NC, the results vary highly from person to a person and therefore it is difficult to come up with an overarching conclusion but all but one participant scored below 4, indicating a rather low NC overall. Based on the conversations that we had, we believe that the moral obligation to remain within one organization is highly dependent on one's values. Many participants believed that it is good to try different things and work for different organizations and that one should definitely not stay with one organization if the person did not feel that there was a good match. Switching organizations was necessarily not a bad thing but only if it did not happen all the time and that there was a reason for it. Dan

concluded: *“Obviously it is not gonna look good on your CV if you do it too often”*. However, they all said that one should be loyal to the company while working there, but that it also depended on how the company treated its employees.

### 5.3.1 Shock Theory

The measures of AC, CC and NC give an indication about how individuals feel and behave in their current situation and NC also touches upon values in general. However, this does not say much about an individual's behavior in case of a sudden occurrence of a jarring event, either positive or negative, that would make the individual re-consider their current situation and eventual repatriation (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 75; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1011). These kinds of shocks were taken into consideration during the interviews by presenting the interviewees four hypothetical situations which they were to respond according to what they assumed they would do. The situations were a close family member getting sick at home, family feeling unhappy in China and wanted to leave, receiving a better payment from another company and a serious conflict situation with the boss or colleagues. For the first situation, majority of the participants said that they would travel home to see this person and probably stay there for some time but that it would not affect their careers in China otherwise. Ellen was the only one who was ready to return home. In relation to shock theory (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1011, 1022-1023), we can say that this implies that since Ellen had been in China for the shortest period of time, she was the one who had the least to lose and hence the host country pull, i.e. the attachment (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010, p. 1022), to the host country was the weakest among the participants. For her, China was also “just an opportunity” and a country where she happened to find a job without having a specific aim. Ellen was also confident that she would easily find a job somewhere else.

For the second situation, the family feeling unhappy, we got rather different responses. The interesting answers were gotten among the entrepreneurs; Matt and Mike responded that they would be able to continue their work from some other country for a while and just be satisfied with paying regular visits to China. As they were both married to Chinese nationals, they however doubted that such a situation would occur. Carl – also married to a Chinese national – expressed skepticism in terms of his wife wanting to leave the country anytime soon. Alfred had recently been through the kind of situation where his family felt unhappy, which had led to his wife and son taking a break from China for a while. Alfred said that they would analyze the situation again after one year. Ellen declared that she would go with her boyfriend if he felt unhappy in China.

In terms of another company offering a better salary in another country, the respondents said that it would really depend on the company and the position that they would get. Sophie mentioned that she would take the job for short term but if it was boring, she would keep looking for more interesting positions in the longer term. Matt said that he would not accept a job offer with short term benefits only. Finally, if they were to face any conflicts with the colleagues, this would not affect their stay in China. Mike said that he is very careful when selecting his business partners so that these kinds of situations could be avoided. Ellen would ask to be moved for another department.

We can interpret host country pull being the strongest for Alfred, Matt, Mike and Carl who had stayed in the country for the longest period of time. The low home country pull is due to the entrepreneurs not believing that the home country would offer them anything better, which makes sense since they have established their own businesses in China and hence are strongly embedded in their organizations. All of them had also stayed in China for almost 10 years and could speak Chinese in some extent, which also implies strong host country embeddedness. Same applies to Carl because of his language skills, strong understanding of the Chinese culture and wide Chinese network. However, the limited career possibilities make his organizational embeddedness low. Ellen's low country embeddedness, on the contrary, can be explained by her staying there only for one year and having mostly foreigner friends. Furthermore, since the company she is working for at the present time has established its presence all over the world, it is possible that she is basing her answers on the option of moving to another location within the same company. Therefore her organizational embeddedness may be rather high.

#### **5.4 Development and Skills: Knowing-How**

Our empirical results show that the SIEs' acquired knowing-how career capital in China is strongly related to the business culture knowledge. The majority of the interviewees claimed that they had acquired a much deeper understanding about how the culture works and how important it is to build good relationships before moving on to business-related matters. Pablo said that doing business is not like Europe where the connections are created fast and can easily be only for a short term. Almost all the participants mentioned China being a much more challenging environment where it is important to be prepared for facing a lot of problems every day. According to Alfred, nothing is easy but everything is possible in China. Matt revealed that he has seen many Western managers complaining about having a wall of problems instead of just one. Ben stated that one should expect the unexpected while Mike found that everything is impermanent and unpredictable. Similarities were also found regarding the thoughts about business environment being much faster than that of Europe. Mike argued that this means that decisions need to be made much faster and with less available information; the opportunity should be taken advantage of when it is there. Pablo said that one of the challenges is to respond fast to the problems. Most of these SIEs also realized that they had learned to understand the importance of China as a growing economy and how much potential it has in the future. Matt found it problematic that many Western organizations still have not understood that. Adjustment and big cultural differences were also topics that were taken up by several people. Sophie said that she has noticed that it is imperative to fit into the culture if one plans to stay in China in long term. Pablo recommended first coming to China for an internship in order to see how the society and life works before deciding if China was something to go for. Ben expressed that it is the foreigner who has to adapt to the values and the lifestyle in China, not the other way around.

On the individual development level, Ellen noticed that she had become more humble and understanding in terms of cultural differences and that her opinion can be valuable. Being from the other side of the world, she can sometimes bring some new perspective to the local way of thinking and doing. Due to active networking, Matt has developed his interpersonal skills and is now much more capable of creating trust with people from

different countries. Dan had improved his skills in driving projects forward and also learned how language affects negotiating power after becoming fluent in Chinese. The same language and cultural knowledge is also applicable to Carl even to the extent that he believes that he would be a much better boss than the AEs he sees coming to China in some cases.

Comparisons were made between the SIEs and expats during some of the interviews. Alfred argued SIEs being more realistic and willing to take risks. It seemed also that many of the entrepreneurs have learned to make fast decisions with limited information available. SIEs further had more in-depth understanding of China reflecting their longer term plans to stay there as compared to expats who were mainly living in an expat bubble and only exposed to Western people and settings.

## **5.5 Chinese and Networking: Knowing-Whom**

When it comes to the extent to which knowing the Chinese language and Chinese people is crucial or relevant, there are some differing opinions. This reflects the fact that the need for using Chinese language depends on the organization, its customers and the type of job. For example, Ellen speaks only English at her work and therefore, for performing her role, knowing Chinese is not very essential. Mike deals mainly with foreign customers but can speak enough Chinese to do his daily work as a manager of Chinese employees. Being a founder of a company in China with Chinese employees, knowing the language is more important for him. Knowing the Chinese language can be important since it makes networking easier which increases SIEs career capital further. Matt sees that the Chinese connections are going to be much more important in the future because not so many foreigners have them. According to both Matt and Ben, the Chinese connections are highly important for setting up a business. Ben states that *“No foreigner can ever help you with establishing a business here, that’s impossible”*.

As mentioned above, doing business in China and targeting Chinese customers, requires adapting to the culture also in terms of language. It is much easier to interact with the Chinese business partners when they can speak freely by using their own language. Ben does not recommend hiring a Chinese interpreter because the interpreter may easily be bribed to be biased on the behalf of the Chinese counterpart. Sophie expressed having faced barriers in communication due to her poor Chinese. From her point of view, the Chinese people are not very open to Westerners, which can however, be somewhat explained by them feeling uncomfortable using English. Ben and Dan, in turn, who are fluent in Chinese, seem to be much better connected with the locals. A majority of the interviewees admitted that they were better connected with the foreigners and tend to spend their free time with them. Foreign networks, however, are valuable if the idea is to work for a Western company or do business with mainly western clients. Overall, the importance of participating in different networking events is highlighted and it also becomes evident when listening to the participants telling about the development of their career trajectories up until today.

When summing up the outcome of the SIEs’ acquired knowing-how, knowing-why and knowing-whom and comparing our results to some prior studies, it is possible to see that in

contrast to the study about SIEs' career capital stagnation in Qatar (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014), SIEs' career capital was perceived to be developing in the Chinese context, although to different degrees. Ben, Carl and Sophie to some extent expressed feelings of *career stagnation* but had nevertheless been able to develop their *career capital* despite of organizational and host-country specific obstacles.

Knowing-why seems to be essential in establishing organizational commitment as suggested by Jokinen et al. (2000, p. 981). This follows the interviewees' statements about the important factors at work being challenging tasks, learning possibilities, autonomy and career growth. The lack of these elements in their organizations, have been leading to the participants switching jobs or thinking of doing so. In other words, the SIEs' motivations for doing a particular job are dependent on the fulfillment of the stated factors. The failure to do that leads to lower level of job satisfaction and eventually quitting the job. The extent to which the knowing-whom, connections, helped the individual to succeed in finding a new employment might have been more relevant than what was suggested by Eby et al. (2003, p. 703), whose study results' indicated that knowing-whom was the least important factor in predicting success in a boundaryless career. Through the discussions we had, we found out that networking had helped almost everyone to find employment at some point during their careers in China. This may be explained by China's business culture characteristics that value personal relationships even more than in Europe. In addition, we discovered that well-established relationships in one job had at times turned out to be longer term partnerships later on. Alfred, for example, asked his previous colleague to become an advisor when he founded a new company. Our findings therefore have a link to Inkson & Arthur's argument about how some of the contacts can be transferred and exploited from one job to another (Inkson & Arthur 2001, p. 51).

According to Defilippi and Arthur (1996, p. 119), the value of career capital competencies depend on the organizational context, meaning the extent to which the person can contribute to the organization as a valuable asset. When it comes to knowing-how, many of the interviewees argued that the China knowledge has become their competitive advantage. Comparing themselves to the expats, they claim being more realistic, risk-takers and placing lower value on the sense of security, which we find important characteristics when it comes to surviving in China's turbulent business environment. The SIEs also argue that they have more cross-cultural understanding and that they can better understand what may be seen as potential problems when doing business from both the foreign and Chinese point of view. Due to this knowledge, SIEs may be better mediators between the Westerns and Chinese compared to AEs. AEs are perceived to be interested in China only in the short-term, which reflects them interacting mainly with foreigners and living in the so-called expat bubble.

## 6 Conclusion

*In this chapter, the intention is to provide a summary of the main ideas that are discussed throughout this paper. The chapter starts by presenting some theoretical and practical contributions that act as a way to answer the research question. Thereafter, follow the practical social and societal implications for the organizations and finally limitations and suggestions for the future research.*

The purpose of this research was to develop recommendations for organizations in China on how to better leverage and retain SIEs as a human resource in China. The research question was:

*How can organizations increase SIEs' organizational commitment and benefit from their acquired career capital in China?*

Organizations can increase SIEs' organizational commitment in China by incorporating autonomy, development opportunities and challenges in their work. We found that the SIEs in our study placed a high value on these factors. The best way of improving or keeping their organizational commitment high is to make sure that these elements are present and available to them in their organization. The lack of these possibilities results in the SIEs switching organizations or remaining only because they have to and thus performing far below their potential. In practice, this implies that it might be useful for the organizations to set clear career objectives together with the SIEs and regularly follow up the progress in order to make sure that they are kept satisfied. It is therefore important to find out why these individuals joined the organization in the first place, what their expectations in terms of the position are and how these expectations can be met in the best way possible. Even though the boundaryless career attitude cannot be totally avoided, it is possible to prolong the individual's stay in one organization if the individual feels that he/she can do meaningful work and pursue the goals and interest of his/her own.

Organizations can benefit from SIEs acquired career capital in China by giving them roles that capitalizes on their unique mix of Chinese specific and international business knowledge as well as their substantial local and international networks. SIEs argue that they can mainly contribute to an organization's competitive advantage in China through their knowledge of Chinese culture and their language skills in combination with their low cost and international business knowledge. While being cheap to employ compared to an AE, an SIE who has been in China for a longer period can possess strong knowing-how skills in terms of understanding both the local way and the international way of doing business. SIEs also develop knowing-whom capital as they have a wide circles of Chinese contacts, which can be beneficial not only when handling the local issues but also when it comes an organization wanting to penetrate the Chinese market, and they also have significant networks among other SIEs in China. Having a strong Chinese network is essential in handling businesses successfully in China and both Chinese and international contacts can be extremely valuable depending on which business one is in.

All in all, by providing free and challenging roles with great development potential, organizations in China can keep SIEs motivated and committed while they can provide excellent mediating skills between host country and home country nationals. SIEs can also

be seen as valuable investments since they are likely to remain in one organization for longer period of time as compared to AEs, if their needs are otherwise been taken care of. Since SIEs are in China because of their own initiative and will, and not due to the generous compensation package, they may be making decisions in the company with more in a long-term perspective. A benefit of hiring SIEs as compared to AEs, is their lower home country pull factors as they are rather reluctant to return home for more than a short while even in case of negative occurrences. For similar reasons, SIEs are more embedded to their host country and willing to remain there in a long term.



**Figure 3. Commitment Factors**

Another contribution of this thesis is that the criterion of intention of temporary stay in Cerdin and Selmer's (2014, p. 1293) recent definition of SIEs should allow for longer term stays and more vague time horizons than what has been suggested. Otherwise the definition risks leading to an overrepresentation of less successful and less well-adjusted individuals in the group of SIEs. While we see temporary intention as a necessary criterion, we argue based on our findings that it should be carefully interpreted and applied in a manner that does not risk excluding individuals with less definite plans or very long term plans for staying in the host country since SIEs often stay as long as they are successful and see opportunities. Research on SIEs need to take into consideration the ad hoc fashion in which some of these individuals plan their futures and we argue that their status as SIEs should not change simply because they see great possibilities in the host country. They will still be the same people and most likely have the same personality traits as they did before. Apart from these objections, we think that the definition is good for determining who is an SIE and who is not. Our suggestion for applying this definition in future research is that the screening question for determining intention of temporary stay should be: Do you intend to retire in this country? Individuals who do not intend to retire in the country where they are currently working we argue cannot be considered immigrants. In combination with the criteria of regular employment, skilled/professional qualifications and self-initiated international relocation, an SIE would be defined as a qualified professional who has moved to a foreign country on their own initiative with the primary intention of working and who intends to leave when they no longer intend to work in the country.

## 6.1 Societal and Ethical Implications for Organizations

In both local and global context, companies are struggling to attract, find and retain a talented workforce (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010, p. 261). Some organizations take the competition seriously and have very detailed and well-functioning human resource management (HRM) policies (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010, p. 260). However, what seems to be lacking in their HRM is the incorporated focus of international professionals, namely the vast number of SIEs who, for different reasons, move from one country to another every year (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010, pp. 260- 261, 264).

Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010, pp. 264-265) argue that having an HRM policy adapted to give support in SIEs' adjustment to the new location and culture can become competitive advantage when it comes to attracting these foreign employees. These authors suggest paying attention to appropriate training and mentoring, as well as non-work related issues such as individual's underlying motivations to expatriate (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010, p. 270). We argue that recruiting SIEs could also contribute to companies' competitive advantage as the SIEs may possess useful knowledge about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which could be implemented in the organization rather than hiring an expensive external consultant, an otherwise common approach to diffuse CSR policies (Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 603-604). Ferrell et al., (2012, p. 16) state that an organization dedicated to taking care of its employees will in turn promote employees to take care of the organization. An SIE coming from outside of China may have additional skills and know-how about how to foster ethical company culture such as work-family programs, competitive salaries and safe work environment (Ferrell et al., 2012, p. 16).

Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) argue that employers have a responsibility to support SIEs' career development. Although SIEs often have protean career attitudes and are often proactive in their career development, in China, some SIEs find themselves getting stuck in situations of underemployment that they cannot get out of since leaving their job has serious consequences for their lives since their residence permits are tied to their employment. We therefore argue that organizations employing SIEs in China have a responsibility to both the SIEs and to society to support their career development. SIEs likely represent a large underutilized human resource in the global arena. By failing to adopt policies that support the SIEs in their unique professional philosophies and lifestyles, companies may be squandering a resource with great potential in society. SIEs generally possess strong intercultural skills and can thus build good relations to host-country nationals and thereby learn a lot about local cultures. This can lead to better understanding between AEs and host-country nationals within a company as SIEs may provide a bridge between the two groups.

Discrimination in relation with SIEs in the recruitment process and internal advancement is an issue that corporations should be aware of. Previous research has theorized that SIEs are not suited for higher level positions in host country organizations (Tharenou, 2013, p. 350) and Kühlmann and Hutchings (2010, pp. 30-31) found that similar views prevailed among the Australian and German companies operating in China in their study. This view is largely based on the perception of SIEs as having low organizational commitment and that they lack company-specific business skills. As these individuals are often seen and treated as temporary workers, it is possible the SIEs do not have same possibilities to get a



permanent or highly qualified job. From our empirical findings, we can see that SIEs are highly proactive and dedicated to their tasks as long as they experience challenge and freedom as well as see opportunities for developing themselves and their careers.

Our contributions highlight SIEs as an underutilized resource in China that is sometimes discriminated against. We have also provided recommendations for companies on how to better leverage this resource in China, including how to retain them and how to utilize their unique set of skills.

## **6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

There are several things to be taken into consideration when reading our study. First of all, due to the emphasis being on the understanding the SIEs' points of views and limited to only ten interviews, the results of the research are not generalizable to all SIEs in China or elsewhere. Furthermore, we have only discussed with people living in Shanghai, which being a modern, dynamic and relatively foreign-friendly city, may have had an effect on how the results turned out. Smaller and less international places in China may present other factors that play an important role in SIEs' lives and career development possibilities in China. In addition, due to the snowball sampling method, the people who took part in the study were all Europeans and mainly from Sweden and Finland, which may lead the study highlighting too much their values and rather homogenous cultural norms in the Nordics. We also acknowledge the fact that including a quantitative element in the research, might have provided some additional information that together with the qualitative part may have presented a more complete picture of SIEs in China. The recommendation for future research is therefore to interview a more heterogeneous population working in China and possibly include some other big cities, other than only Shanghai, where international companies are located. Another option could be to interview HR departments of the companies who employ SIEs and explore how they believe they are fulfilling the SIEs' needs. It would be also interesting to make a quantitative study and compare the viewpoints of SIEs and the companies and find out how similar or different are the perceptions of the SIEs' career development possibilities, current treatment and satisfaction, for instance.

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# Appendix I Interview Guide

## Personal info

- **Can you tell us a little about who you are?**
  - Country
  - Organization & Position?
    - How long have you had this?

## China

First we would like to get an idea of how you ended up in China and how you have adjusted to life here.

- **Can you tell us how you ended up in China?**
  - Why did you come to China?
    - Was it your own idea from the beginning? (Self-initiated?)
    - Have you had an expatriate experience before?
      - If yes: can you describe it?
  - Did you receive any support from any organization in your home country?
    - If yes: Which organization? What sort of support?
  - How did you come to the decision to go to China?
    - Was it a difficult decision?
    - What were the most important factors?
      - Why were those factors important to you?
  - How long did you initially intend to stay?
    - Is that still your plan?

## Previous work experience

- **What did you do in your home country before you came to China?**
  - What kind of education do you have?
  - How much work experience did you have before coming to China?
    - Would you say you have skilled or professional qualifications for your current position?
  - Do you have a regular job here in China now?
    - If no: Are you looking for a regular job?

## Career

- **Can you tell us about your career in China up until today?**
  - How many different companies have you worked for?
  - What made you leave the first, second etc., company?
  - How do you think you developed as a person and a professional in company xyz?
- **Can you tell us a little about your career goals?** (have they changed during your time in China?, how does this org. contribute to them etc.)
  - What's your career goal?
    - Do you feel that your current organization is helping you achieve this goal?

If yes:

- How?
  - Do they offer training or other developing activities?
  - Can you give some examples?
  - Have you taken part in such activities?
    - How did you find them?

If no:

- What do you think they could do better to help you achieve your goal?
- How does it make you feel?
- How do you define and measure career success?
  - What factors do you consider?
  - How important is it to have a managerial position/challenging job?
- **Do you feel that your current organization is giving you the opportunity to control the direction of your career?**
  - How?
- **Do you feel that your current organization gives you opportunities to express your values in your work?**
  - How?
  - Do you feel that your values are taken seriously?

### Organization

- **Can you tell us more about the organization you're currently working for? (size, what you like/dislike, atmosphere etc.)**
  - How many people are working in the organization?
    - In your department?
  - How did you find this job?
  - Why did you decide to work for this organization?
  - What do you like about this organization?
  - How would you describe the organizational culture to someone else?
  - What is the Chinese/foreigner ratio?
  - Do you spend time with your colleagues in your free time?
    - Why/why not?
    - What kind of activities & how often?
  - What kind of company events do you have?
    - Can you describe one of them?
- **How is it to work for this organization?**

### Current position:

- **Can you tell us about your current position? (daily tasks, what you like/dislike, relationship with the colleagues etc.)**
  - What is your position and how long have you had this?
  - What is your salary level?
    - Are you satisfied with the salary you receive from your organization?

- Can you describe your normal day?
  - How similar are the tasks you perform in a typical workday?
  - Has the work lived up to your expectations?
- How many hours do you work per week on average?
- What is the best/most important about this job?
- What would you change?
- Can you describe the main challenges in your job?
- How often do you encounter too much stress?
  - How do you handle stress?
  - Is the company offering any special benefits?
    - How would you rate them/how important are they to you?
- How is the relationship between you and
  - the manager?
  - colleagues?
- Have you consider changing a job?
  - What would make you change jobs?
- How satisfied are you at your current job?

### **Social life**

- **Can you tell us something about your social life/free time here in China?**
  - How do you like living here?
    - How long have you been in China?
    - How would you describe Shanghai?
    - Have you learned any Chinese?
      - How much?
  - Do you have many Chinese friends?
    - What do you do when you met them?
      - Can you give some examples from the last few weeks?
  - Do you have many friends here of other nationalities?
    - What do you do when you meet them?
      - Can you give some examples from the last few weeks?
  - What do you do on your free time?
  - How important is it for you to be socially active outside the work?
    - Do you attend any events or gatherings where you meet other expatriates?
      - Why/why not?
    - Any events where you get a chance to socialize with mainly Chinese people?
      - Why/ why not?

### **Family**

- **Can you describe your family situation?**
  - What is your relationship status?
  - Which nationality is your spouse?
  - Do you have kids? Which age?
- How often do you visit your home country?

- Are you and your family satisfied with that or would you/they like to visit more often?

#### **Future**

- **Can you tell us something about your future plans?** (Are you planning to stay here or go back home etc.)
- **How do you think your experience in China has affected you?**
  - In terms of personal development?
  - In terms of career development?
  - In terms of your feelings towards your current employer?
    - Towards potential future employers?

#### **Stay in China:**

- **Can you tell us something about your initial plans about staying in China?**
- When you first came to China, how long did you plan to stay?
  - Did you intend to stay forever or come back after some time?
  - (why did your plans change?)
  - Can you consider living in another place in China?
  - How important is it for you to live in China vs. another foreign country or internationally?

#### **Return:**

- **What are your plans regarding returning back to your home country?**
  - Do you still plan to return to your home country?
    - Have you considered returning your home country in the near future?
    - When?
    - Has the company offered you a position in your home country?
      - Do you think there's a chance that they will?
  - Which kind of events would make you consider returning to your home country prematurely?
  - Have you looked for jobs in your home country?
  - What would you do in case of following event:
    - Family in China feels unhappy?
    - Family/relative in your home country is sick?
    - Problems with your supervisor/colleague?
    - A rival company offers you a job with a better payment

## Appendix II Organizational Commitment Control Questions

Organizational Commitment Items From Allen and Meyer (1990).

I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to \*CC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organization \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one lined up \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization now \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree



I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice — another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I think that people these days move from company to company too often \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I do not believe that a person always need to be loyal to his or her organization \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore I feel a moral obligation to remain \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers \*NC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now \*cc

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization \*AC

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree

I do not think that wanting to be a "company man" or "company woman" is sensible any more \*NC

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

I strongly disagree

I strongly agree