Expatriates are “individuals who go overseas to accomplish a job-related goal” (Sinangil & Ones, 2001, p. 425). As the outcomes of overseas assignments can have a substantial impact on the well-being of organizations as well as on expatriates themselves, the importance of adjustment to the foreign environment has been well recognized. In fact, an increasing number of studies have begun to examine the consequences of adjustment of expatriates to their foreign setting (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). Nonetheless, studies that examine the mediating effects of expatriate adjustment are limited (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi, Wang, & Marinova, 2005). Scholars have also proposed that individual differences may predict likelihood of successful adjustment to a foreign environment (Caligiuri, 2000a, 2000b; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006).

Goal orientation, which refers to the mental framework for how individuals respond to and interpret goal attainment situations (Yeo & Neal, 2004), may be a relevant individual difference to investigate with respect to international assignment (Gong & Fan, 2006). This relevance emerges because adjusting to a foreign environment can be construed as a social learning process whereby the expatriates acquire knowledge and skills (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Porter & Tansky, 1999), and goal orientation has been applied frequently and successfully to examining individual performance on skill/knowledge acquisition tasks in both educational and training settings (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; VandeWalle, Cron, & Slocum, 2001). Further, recent studies that tested goal orientation theory (Dweck, 1986) on cross-cultural adjustment have yielded encouraging results in student samples (e.g., Gong & Fan, 2006).

The main contributions of this study, therefore, are to illuminate the role of goal orientation on expatriate adjustment and work-related outcomes and to explicitly test the mediating effects of adjustment. To do so, we refine Gong and Fan’s (2006) study by differentiating performance goal orientation into proving and avoiding goal orientations. In addition, we use actual expatriates on assignment with longitudinal job performance ratings to test these relationships (along with cross-sectional data on premature return intentions). Further, important variables from other theoretical perspectives were incorporated in the current study, such as expatriate work stress from the stress perspective and perceived organizational support (POS) from the social exchange perspective. This way, the effects of goal orientation are more rigorously tested and evidence may be obtained to support goal orientation perspective as a unique theoretical perspective in understanding expatriate adjustment and outcomes.

Theoretical Overview of Goal Orientation

The construct of goal orientation originated in educational psychology. Dweck (1986) first proposed that individuals have two

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1 It should be noted that several previous studies have shown some evidence that Big Five personality traits are related to expatriate adjustment and/or job performance (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000a, 2000b; Dalton & Wilson, 2000; Shaffer et al., 2006). However, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate the utility of using a goal orientation perspective to examine expatriation processes. We do not intend to argue or test whether goal orientation variables will be better predictors than Big Five personality traits for expatriate adjustment and outcomes. Therefore, we did not control for personality in the current study. This approach is consistent with previous studies that examined goal orientation variables on skill/knowledge acquisition tasks in both educational and training settings (e.g., Elliot & McGregor, 2001; VandeWalle et al., 2001), as well as on cross-cultural adjustment (Gong & Fan, 2006).
types of goal orientation preferences in achievement situations: (1) a learning goal orientation, which is to develop competence through expanding one’s competencies by mastering challenging situations, and (2) a performance goal orientation, which is to demonstrate and validate one’s competence. Subsequent researchers (e.g., Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997) refined performance goal orientation into two facets: a proving goal orientation that focuses on demonstrating one’s competence and gaining favorable judgments, and an avoiding goal orientation that focuses on avoiding negation of one’s competence and negative judgments from others. This three-factor conceptualization of goal orientation, including learning, proving, and avoiding goal orientations, has been empirically supported by various studies (e.g., Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999; VandeWalle et al., 2001). Thus, we follow this three-factor model of goal orientation in this study. In the following sections, we discuss the role of goal orientations on expatriate adjustment, followed by the mediating role of adjustment between goal orientations and expatriate outcomes. The proposed relationships developed in the subsequent sections are depicted in Figure 1.

The Role of Goal Orientation on Expatriate Adjustment

After being relocated to a new international setting, expatriates must acquire the appropriate knowledge, information, and skills in order to function effectively in the host environment (Earley & Ang, 2003). Accordingly, individual expatriates typically learn and acquire knowledge and skills through at least three types of socio-cultural adjustment (i.e., work, interaction, and general). This tripartite conceptualization of adjustment facets has been validated in numerous studies (e.g., Black & Stephens, 1989; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998). Furthermore, Gong and Fan (2006) provided preliminary support for the importance of goal orientation during cross-cultural adjustment of international students.

Work adjustment entails a process through which expatriates achieve comfort and familiarity with work values, expectations, and standards of the host work environment. During this adjustment process, expatriates learn their new job roles, the new performance standards and expectations, and the type of leadership expected of them by their subordinates. This learning process is critical for expatriates to improve their task performance (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Therefore, expatriates with a higher learning goal orientation toward the overseas assignment are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to improve their work adjustments. Expatriates with higher proving goal orientation may also be able to improve their work adjustment due to their motivation to demonstrate high levels of competency. In contrast, expatriates with higher avoiding goal orientation may try to shy away from this challenging process and put less effort into learning job-related knowledge, as they try to avoid making errors and have low intrinsic motivation to develop corresponding competences. Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 1: Expatriate goal orientation is related to work adjustment such that (a) a learning goal orientation is positively related to work adjustment, (b) a proving goal orientation

Figure 1. Proposed partially mediated goal orientation model for expatriate outcomes. + = positive relationship; – = negative relationship.
is positively related to work adjustment, and (c) an avoiding goal orientation is negatively related to work adjustment.

Interaction adjustment involves a process through which expatriates achieve comfort in interacting with the host-country nationals. During this process, expatriates learn how to appropriately interact with local people across both work and nonwork settings. It also helps expatriates build relationships with local coworkers and facilitate their task performance in the managerial aspects of the overseas assignment (Kraimer et al., 2001). Therefore, expatriates with higher learning goal orientation are likely to proactively engage in this process to develop their competencies in communications with host-country nationals. Expatriates with higher proving goal orientation are also likely to invest effort to improve their interaction adjustments for the purpose of showing good task performance. Again, expatriates with higher avoiding goal orientation may view this process as a challenging situation that increases the risk of receiving negative feedback from others. To avoid making errors, they may be less motivated to put effort into interacting with local people. Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 2: Expatriate goal orientation is related to interaction adjustment such that (a) a learning goal orientation is positively related to interaction adjustment, (b) a proving goal orientation is positively related to interaction adjustment, and (c) an avoiding goal orientation is negatively related to interaction adjustment.

General adjustment involves a process through which expatriates become comfortable and establish familiarity with the local surroundings in the host country. For example, general adjustment involves acquiring knowledge about specific shopping places, learning about the most popular local entertainment, and exploring living in the new environment. Thus, mastering knowledge about local living conditions may help expatriates better understand the host culture (Kraimer et al., 2001). Therefore, expatriates with higher learning goal orientations are likely to be motivated to achieve better general adjustment, because they tend to develop more coherent knowledge structures and to engage in deeper processing of the knowledge (Elliot et al., 1999). In contrast, expatriates with higher proving goal orientations are not likely to put significant effort into the general adjustment process because it does not serve their purpose of demonstrating adequate competency during the overseas assignment. For expatriates with higher avoiding goal orientations, the general adjustment process creates no risk of receiving negative feedback on their expatriate job performance. As such, no negative or positive influences are expected from the proving and avoiding goal orientations to general adjustment.

Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 3: Expatriate goal orientation is related to general adjustment such that (a) a learning goal orientation is positively related to general adjustment, (b) a proving goal orientation is not related to general adjustment, and (c) an avoiding goal orientation is not related to general adjustment.

The Mediating Role of Adjustment Between Goal Orientation and Expatriate Outcomes

According to Gong and Fan (2006), different facets of goal orientation differentially influence cross-cultural adjustment. In addition, we expect cross-cultural adjustment, in turn, to affect expatriate outcomes such as job performance and premature return intentions (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005). From the social learning perspective (Black & Mendenhall, 1991), these adjustment processes may be central in linking the goal orientation dimensions to expatriate outcomes. Therefore, examining the mediation roles of adjustment variables may provide a better understanding about how expatriates’ motivations to achieve and maintain desirable outcomes in the expatriate context impact their actual work-related behaviors. Below, we focus on developing the mediation role of adjustment between each specific goal orientation facet and expatriate outcomes. Given that there are several different variables that may also act as mediators (e.g., self-efficacy, goal level, effort level, and task anxiety; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; VandeWalle et al., 2001), we expect the mediating effects of expatriate adjustment variables to be partial.

First, individuals with a learning goal orientation have been identified as being attracted to learning situations and approaching knowledge acquisition tasks with self-improvement goals (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Further, learning goal orientation has been found to be positively related to the desire to work hard (VandeWalle, 1997), deep processing of task-related knowledge (Elliot et al., 1999), and persistence and effort when facing obstacles and failures (Elliot et al., 1999; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999; Yeo & Neal, 2004). These positive influences of learning goal orientation are likely to have critical implications for expatriate performance because it is important for expatriates to learn behaviors appropriate in the host country in order to function effectively on international assignments (Earley & Ang, 2003; Porter & Tansky, 1999). As such, it is likely that expatriates with a learning goal orientation may reach better expatriate outcomes through adjusting well to the host culture by mastering culturally appropriate values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 4: Work, interactional, and general adjustment partially mediate the relationships between learning goal orientation and expatriate outcomes.

Second, individuals with a proving goal orientation have been identified as being focused on demonstrating the appearance of high competency in skill or knowledge acquisition tasks. According to Elliot and McGregor (2001), a proving goal orientation can motivate individuals to invest more effort and demonstrate greater persistence in acquiring new knowledge to achieve good performance. For example, researchers have found consistently positive relationships between proving goal orientation and task performance in both student (e.g., Elliot et al., 1999) and field samples (e.g., VandeWalle et al., 1999). Hence, a proving goal orientation may also lead expatriates to achieve good performance through adjusting well to the work assignment and local people at work. Furthermore, premature return usually indicates failure on international assignment. It is conceivable that expatriates with higher proving goal orientation will be less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviors because such behaviors are contradictory to their goal of gaining positive assessment on the international assignment. In addition, expatriates with a proving goal orientation may have better work and interaction adjustment, which, in turn, will lead to a lower level of premature return intention (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Thus, we expected the following:
Hypothesis 5: Work and interaction adjustment partially mediate the relationships between a proving goal orientation and expatriate outcomes.

Finally, individuals with an avoiding goal orientation prefer to avoid novel or challenging achievement situations because failure to achieve good performance reflects negatively on their competencies. For example, Elliot et al. (1999) found that avoiding goals evoked self-protective concerns that precluded rigorous persistence and full effort expenditure during the task acquisition processes, which, in turn, led to poor performance and withdrawal cognition. Thus, an avoiding goal orientation may sabotage the likelihood that an individual will actually develop the competence that he or she wishes to demonstrate. Given that adjusting to a foreign environment can be construed as a knowledge acquisition process, it is conceivable that expatriates who have higher avoiding goal orientations may have lower levels of work and interaction adjustment, which, in turn, will reduce their performance during international assignment and increase their willingness to prematurely terminate the assignment. Therefore, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 6: Work and interaction adjustment partially mediate the relationships between an avoiding goal orientation and expatriate outcomes.

The Roles of POS and Work Stress

In order to examine more rigorously the current hypotheses on the goal orientation perspective and to differentiate it from other theoretical perspectives previously used in the expatriate adjustment literature, we also integrated and tested the roles of POS and work stress during expatriate adjustment. POS has been used within the social exchange perspective (e.g., Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004) whereas work stress has been used within the stress perspective (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2005). For instance, previous studies (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Kraimer et al., 2001) have found that expatriate adjustment variables also partially mediate the effects of POS on expatriate outcomes (i.e., job performance and premature return intention). POS assures employees that the organization will help them—when needed—to handle stressful situations and carry out their jobs effectively (Guzzo et al., 1994). Given that expatriates are living and working in the foreign country at the request of their organizations, POS is likely to be a particularly valuable variable, leading to improved expatriate adjustment that, in turn, leads to better expatriate outcomes (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Thus, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 7: Work, interaction, and general adjustment partially mediate the relationships between POS and expatriate outcomes.

Another important variable noted in the expatriate research literature is work stress. It has been viewed as an indicator of lack of adaptation to the new environment and has been linked to undesirable expatriate outcomes (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2005). Within the current model, it is possible that work stress may act as another mediator on the relationships between avoiding goal orientation and expatriate outcomes. Avoiding goal orientation influences stress-related variables such as anxiety by evoking people’s fear of failure when facing challenging tasks and environments (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In fact, in a recent study, Cron, Slocum, VandeWalle, and Fu (2005) found that an avoiding goal orientation was positively related to workers’ negative emotional reactions. Furthermore, lack of POS may also heighten work stress as expatriates are forced to cope with stressors in the unfamiliar environment without necessary support. Therefore, we expected the following:

Hypothesis 8: Work stress partially mediates the relationships (a) between an avoiding goal orientation and expatriate outcomes, and (b) between POS and expatriate outcomes.

Method

Sample

Expatriates were recruited, as part of a larger study, from a multinational manufacturing company with offices in major metropolitan areas in China. At Time 1 data collection, 215 available expatriates were surveyed; 183 expatriates returned the survey, yielding a response rate of 86.1%. The surveys, along with a cover letter assuring confidentiality and voluntary participation, were distributed to each expatriate. No participant who returned the survey had missing data. Six months later (Time 2), we obtained job performance scores from the supervisors for 148 of 183 expatriates (80.9%). These high response rates were achieved as a result of company sponsorship and the usage of company time to complete the survey.

In terms of nationality represented by this sample of expatriates, at Time 1, approximately 69.4% of respondents were from the United States, 14.8% from Canada, 11.5% from Australia, and the remaining 4.3% from the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. The sample included 23 women (12.6%). The demographics of the expatriates at Time 1 were as follows: mean age = 37.19 years (SD = 5.67), mean parent company tenure = 7.05 years (SD = 2.03), and mean current assignment tenure = 2.06 years (SD = 0.91). The majority of participants (N = 129) at Time 1 were married (70.5%); 92 (71.3%) of these expatriates had their spouses accompany them on the international assignment.

Measures

Goal orientation. Goal orientation facets were each measured by three items from Elliot and McGregor’s (2001) scale. We chose their scale for its conciseness.2 Similar to VandeWalle et al. (2001), these items were adapted to the international assignment setting. Sample items from this scale include the following: “I want to learn as much as possible at this expatriate assignment” (learning goal orientation), “It is important for me to do well comparing to other expatriates here” (proving goal orientation),

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2 We did not include the mastery avoidance facet of goal orientation from Elliot and McGregor (2001) for two reasons. First, literature in both industrial–organizational psychology and educational psychology has validated the three-factor conceptualization (i.e., learning, proving, and avoiding orientations) of goal orientation (e.g., Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot et al., 1999; VandeWalle et al., 2001). Second, given that the four-factor conceptualization of goal orientation is relatively new, fewer empirical findings are available that can be used to hypothesize relationships for expatriates on international assignments.
and “My goal in this expatriate assignment is to avoid performing poorly” (avoiding goal orientation). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The Cronbach’s alphas for these three-item scales were .90, .91, and .87 for learning, proving, and avoiding goal orientations, respectively.

**POS.** POS was measured by a shortened seven-item version of the POS scale from Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The reliability for this scale was .88.

**Expatriate adjustment.** The 14-item adjustment measure by Black and Stephens (1989) was used to assess work (3 items), interaction (4 items), and general (7 items) adjustment facets. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = very unadjusted to 7 = very adjusted). The Cronbach’s alphas were .79 for work, .89 for interaction, and .89 for general adjustment facets.

**Premature return intentions.** Expatriates’ intentions to withdraw from their overseas assignments were assessed with five items adapted from previous studies (e.g., Black & Stephens, 1989; Guzzo et al., 1994). A sample item reads “I will request an early return to a domestic assignment with my company.” Participants were asked to indicate “yes” if the item accurately described their work situation, “no” if it did not, and “?” if they could not decide or were uncertain. The scoring for the SIG scale followed Stanton et al.’s (2001) rule: “no” = 0, “yes” = 3, “?” = 1.5. The reliability of this scale was .89.

**Job performance.** At Time 2, expatriates’ immediate supervisors provided ratings of expatriates on a five-item general performance scale used by Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). A sample item from this scale is “This employee fulfills all responsibilities required by his/her job.” A 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used. The Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for this general performance scale.3

**Covariates.** Because previous studies (e.g., Gong & Fan, 2006; Takeuchi et al., 2005) have suggested that age, gender, presence of spouse on international assignments, and current assignment tenure may have potential effects on adjustment variables, supplementary analyses were run including these covariates as controls. However, the results were highly consistent with results obtained without the covariates and did not change any substantive interpretations of the results.4

### Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all measures, including means, standard deviations, correlations, and interitem reliabilities. In particular, learning goal orientation correlated significantly with all adjustment variables and expatriate outcomes (Irls ranged from .15 to .26), whereas proving and avoiding goal orientations correlated significantly with work and interaction adjustment and expatriate outcomes (Irls ranged from .16 to .20), but not with general adjustment.

### Measurement Model Testing

Following Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) two-stage procedure for structural equation modeling, we first estimated a measurement model (M0) that included all 10 intended latent constructs (i.e., learning, proving, and avoiding goal orientations; POS, work, interaction, and general adjustments; work stress, premature return intention, and job performance), using Mplus 4.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2006).5 Missing values in the Time 2 performance measure were modeled with an expectation-maximization algorithm by assuming that the data were missing at random (Little & Rubin, 1987). The measurement model provided a very good fit to the data, $\chi^2(1035, N = 183) = 1,194.66, p < .01$, incremental fit index (IFI) = .97, comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .03. In addition, all the scale items (i.e., indicators) loaded significantly onto their corresponding latent constructs (standardized factor loadings ranged from .75 to 1.00), demonstrating clear distinction among all the latent constructs included in this model. As such, the measurement model appears well-suited to test further structural equation models.

### Structural Model Testing

Using Mplus 4.0, the proposed partial mediation model (M1) depicted in Figure 1 was estimated on the basis of the measurement model. In this model, the correlations among antecedents (i.e., learning goal orientation, proving goal orientation, avoiding goal orientation, and POS) were allowed to be freely estimated. M1 yielded a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(1,048, N = 183) = 1,270.97, p < .01$, IFI = .95, CFI = .95, and RMSEA = .03, and most of the hypothesized paths were significant. However, the model fit of M1 differed significantly from the measurement model (M0), $\Delta\chi^2(13, N = 183) = 76.31, p < .01$, and the coefficients between interaction adjustment and job performance and premature return intention were not significant ($\gamma = -.03, p > .1$; and $\gamma = -.05, p > .1$; respectively). Moreover, the modification indices suggested

3 At Time 1, we also collected a concurrent measure of job performance. The correlation between Time 1 and Time 2 job performance measures was quite high (r = .74, p < .01), showing convergent validity of these two measures. We have also tested the current model with the concurrent performance measure and the results are comparable. For the purpose of brevity, we did not report the results for the concurrent job performance here. More details regarding this concurrent performance measure are available upon request to Mo Wang.

4 The results of supplementary analyses with control variables are available from Mo Wang.

5 In this study, 10 intended latent factors were expected (i.e., 9 constructs that were assessed by self-report and 1 by supervisory-report). As such, we compared a 10-factor exploratory factor analysis model with a 9-factor model (i.e., a reduced model) using Mplus 4.0. Missing values in the Time 2 performance measure were modeled by assuming that the data were missing at random (Little & Rubin, 1987). The 10-factor model, $\chi^2(693, N = 183) = 840.10, p < .01$, yielded 10 clear factors with items from different scales loading onto different factors. There were no cross-loadings higher than 0.17. The 9-factor model, $\chi^2(732, N = 183) = 963.26, p < .01$, fit significantly worse than the 10-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2(49, N = 183) = 123.16, p < .01$. These findings suggest that it is appropriate to estimate the 10-factor model as the measurement model for the current analysis.
that the model fit could be improved greatly by specifying relationships between interaction adjustment and work adjustment and general adjustment. Therefore, it is possible that the effects of interaction adjustment on expatriate outcomes might greatly overlap with effects of work and general adjustment (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2001). As such, we tested an alternative model (M2), in which the direct effects of interaction adjustment on expatriate outcomes were removed and the effects of interaction adjustment on expatriate outcomes were specified as being mediated by work and general adjustments. Another constraint added to M2 was to fix the direct relationship between POS and job performance to zero, as this relationship was not significant in M1.

M2 yielded a good fit to the data as well. $\chi^2(1049, N = 183) = 1,212.29, p < .01$, IFI = .97, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .03, and all estimated structural paths in M2 were significant. More important, unlike M1, M2 did not differ significantly from the measurement model (M0), $\Delta \chi^2(14, N = 183) = 17.63, p > .1$. We further estimated a full mediation model (M3) that was nested to M2 by removing all direct paths from the antecedents (i.e., goal orientation variables and POS) to expatriate outcomes. This full mediation model yielded the following fit indices: $\chi^2(1056, N = 183) = 1,243.17, p < .01$, IFI = .96, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .03. It fit significantly worse to the current data as compared to M2, $\Delta \chi^2(7, N = 183) = 30.88, p < .01$. As such, these findings suggest that M3 is more optimal for investigating further the hypothesized indirect effects. The standardized path coefficients and correlations in M3 are presented in Figure 2. The parameter estimates indicate support for Hypotheses 1 through 3.

### Testing Indirect Effects

Following suggestions from MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams (2004); Preacher and Hayes (2005); and Shrout and Bolger (2002), we tested directly the hypothesized indirect effects in M2 by using a bootstrapping approach. Specifically, both 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals (CI) and 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CIs were obtained for hypothesized indirect effects using 1,000 bootstrap samples. Table 2 presents the bootstrap CIs for each indirect effect between each antecedent and each outcome via each mediator as well as the total indirect effects between each antecedent and each outcome.

From Table 2, it can be seen that the two approaches of obtaining bootstrap CIs yielded highly consistent results. Specifically, supporting Hypothesis 4, 5, and 6, work adjustment mediated the relationships between learning, proving, and avoiding goal orientations and expatriate job performance. General adjustment was found to mediate the relationship between learning goal orientation and premature return intention. In addition, there are some indirect effects from goal orientation variables to expatriate outcomes via the path of interaction adjustment. Further, supporting Hypothesis 7, work adjustment mediated the relationship between POS and expatriate job performance; interaction adjustment mediated the relationship between POS and job performance; and general adjustment mediated the relationship between POS and premature return intention. Finally, supporting Hypothesis 8a, work stress mediated the relationship between avoiding goal orientation and expatriate job performance and premature return intention. In addition, supporting Hypothesis 8b, work stress was also found to

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**Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Alpha Reliabilities for Measures**

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<tr>
<td>Premature return intention</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job performance</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. For all variables, $N = 183$, except job performance ($N = 148$). Alpha coefficient reliabilities appear in parentheses along diagonal. POS = perceived organizational support.
mediate the relationships between POS and job performance and premature return intention.

Discussion

This study represents one of the first attempts to empirically link three goal orientation dimensions to expatriate outcomes in the field setting. We found that the relationships between goal orientation and expatriate outcomes were partially mediated by expatriate adjustment variables. The findings suggest that one possible mechanism for goal orientation influencing expatriate outcomes is through facilitating or hindering the expatriate adjustment processes. Despite the commonly accepted assumption that adjustment acts as a mediator, there are only a limited number of studies that have actually examined adjustment as mediators. Overall, these findings confirm the centrality and criticality of expatriate adjustments as process variables during international assignments and contribute to furthering our understanding of expatriation experiences.

The partial mediation relationships identified in the current study also underscore the learning nature of expatriate adjustment processes suggested by some researchers (e.g., Earley & Ang, 2003). According to Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005), previous attempts to understand expatriate adjustment variables have typically been based on a stressor–stress–strain formulation. From this formulation, adjustment to various aspects of international assignment is often viewed as a response pattern to the stress caused by unsuccessful coping to the stressors in the foreign environment.

However, the current study suggests an additional learning perspective that may be extended in the future.

Among the relationships identified between goal orientation and expatriate adjustment variables, the significant positive relationships between a proving goal orientation and work and interaction adjustments are of particular interest. These results are inconsistent with previous research using an international student sample (Gong & Fan, 2006) that did not find a significant relationship between performance goal orientation and adjustment. This inconsistency may be due to the difference in the conceptualization of goal orientation dimensions (performance goal orientation vs. proving and avoiding goal orientations). As such, the current study also demonstrates the advantage of using the three-factor conceptualization of goal orientation.

The current findings demonstrate that effects of interaction adjustment on expatriate outcomes were mediated by work adjustment and general adjustment. These results are consistent with findings by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) and they support contact theory (Kraimer et al., 2001), which posits that the interaction between expatriates and host nationals may improve their interpersonal relationship at work and help them to develop positive feelings toward the host environment, and thus lead to better work and general adjustment.

The results of the present study must be viewed in light of the study’s limitations. First, given our research objectives, we did not include other possible mediators. As such, future research should examine additional motivational components during the expatriate
assignment. Further, according to Elliot and Thrash (2002), personality traits and goal orientations may have sequential functions in the motivational process. Specifically, personality traits are viewed as energizers of valenced propensities, whereas goal orientations are viewed as specific, cognitive forms of regulation that give focus and direction to these general propensities. It is possible that the effects of personality traits on expatriate adjustment and outcomes may be mediated by goal orientation. This may explain the small effect sizes found between personality traits and expatriate outcomes.

Second, most measures used in the current study utilized self-report ratings, raising common method bias concerns. These concerns are alleviated to some extent by the additional analyses comparing the measurement model and the common method model. However, future research should obtain measures from multiple sources and methods to minimize the potential for common method bias. A related concern is that the current sample contained Western expatriates assigned to China from only one multinational company, and the majority of the expatriates were male. Therefore, the generalizability of the results to expatriates from other cultures and other industries, and to females, is still unknown. Future research may focus on examining these generalizability issues by using more gender-balanced samples from different cultures and industries.

These limitations aside, this study has several important implications for human resource professionals in charge of expatriates. First, our results highlight the importance of expatriates’ goal orientations toward international assignments—these goal orientations can be used as additional selection criteria. Second, it may be beneficial for human resource managers or trainers to improve expatriates’ learning goal orientations toward international assignments through maximizing expatriates’ intellectual curiosity and passion for learning.

6 To estimate a common method model, following an anonymous reviewer’s suggestion, we added 11th (self-reports) and 12th (supervisor rated) latent factors into the measurement model with the dual loadings for every indicator specified accordingly. The correlations between these method factors and other factors were constrained to zero. The correlation between the two method factors was also constrained to zero. This common method model had the following fit indices: $\chi^2(987, N = 183) = 1,143.71$, $p < .01$, IFI = .97, CFI = .97, and RMSEA = .03. Comparing this common method model to the measurement model, $\chi^2(1035, N = 183) = 1,194.66, p < .01$, IFI = .97, CFI = .96, and RMSEA = .03, the restricted chi-square test yielded a nonsignificant result, $\Delta\chi^2(48, N = 183) = 50.95, p > .1$, suggesting that adding common method factors did not improve the model fit significantly. As such, concerns about common method bias in the current study were reduced.

References


Table 2

Bootstrap Confidence Intervals for the Total and Specific Indirect Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedent and mediator</th>
<th>Job performance</th>
<th>Premature return intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95% CI (PB)</td>
<td>95% CI (BCB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning goal orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work adjustment</td>
<td>0.012, 0.073</td>
<td>0.010, 0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>0.006, 0.017</td>
<td>0.004, 0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td>0.033, 0.093</td>
<td>0.027, 0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proving goal orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work adjustment</td>
<td>0.017, 0.070</td>
<td>0.021, 0.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>−0.001, 0.023</td>
<td>0.000, 0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td>0.008, 0.101</td>
<td>0.008, 0.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding goal orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work adjustment</td>
<td>−0.071, −0.011</td>
<td>−0.065, −0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>−0.047, 0.005</td>
<td>−0.054, 0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work stress</td>
<td>−0.082, −0.016</td>
<td>−0.095, −0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td>−0.137, −0.091</td>
<td>−0.135, −0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work adjustment</td>
<td>0.009, 0.064</td>
<td>0.012, 0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>0.012, 0.026</td>
<td>0.010, 0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General adjustment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work stress</td>
<td>0.001, 0.060</td>
<td>0.004, 0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total indirect effects</td>
<td>0.019, 0.144</td>
<td>0.014, 0.159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Unstandardized estimates are reported. CI = confidence interval; PB = percentile bootstrap; BCB = bias-corrected bootstrap; POS = perceived organizational support.