

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS WITH SOUTHEAST ASIAN DOCTORATES IN CHINA

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Abstract: As higher education becomes increasingly globalized, more and more Chinese doctoral degree holders have obtained their academic credentials from Southeast Asia and later entered the Chinese academic market. Existing research has not looked into the professional identity development and career trajectory of this group. This study investigates how teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities form their professional identities through cross-cultural adaptation and teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and professional commitment. Based on social cognitive theory, organizational support theory, and cross-cultural adaptation theory, the study proposes a structured model whereby the professional commitment performs mediating roles between psychological and organizational factors on professional identities. In addition, the study further investigates the moderating effect of years of teaching experience in China and motivations for taking PhD study in Southeast Asia.

The study utilized a quantitative research design applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. Through a structured questionnaire survey, data were collected from 350 university teachers. All respondents estimated to have obtained doctoral degrees from Southeast Asian institutions currently working in Chinese higher education institutions. The findings reveal that cross-cultural adaptation, teacher's self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support positively affect professional identity. The associations of both factors with professional identity were partially mediated by professional commitment. Also, the connection between teacher self-efficacy and professional identity is strengthened by teaching experience, while cross-cultural adaptation and professional identity are moderated by motivation for doctoral study in Southeast Asia.

The results show that the professional identity of internationally qualified academics is shaped by their individual psychological factors and institutional support. According to the researchers, the study contributes to the literature on teacher professional identity and international academic mobility by focusing on Southeast Asia trained scholars. The findings also have practical implications for universities interested in aiding the professional development and career integration of internationally educated professors.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Perceived Organizational Support, Professional Commitment, International Doctoral Graduates, Higher Education in China

Introduction

In recent decades, globalization of higher education has significantly altered academic mobility, knowledge exchange and faculty development across countries. An increasing number of universities across the globe aim at the recruitment of internationally educated faculty members for research collaboration as well as exposure to diverse perspectives. According to Altbach and de Wit (2020) and Mok and Jiang (2021), China with its high level of higher education system in the world tries to recruit scholars with a doctoral degree from overseas for strengthening academic innovation and internationalization strategies. An increasing number of teachers with doctorates from Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries are joining the ranks of foreign-trained academics. The increasing academic travel appears to be partially attributable to the expansion of transnational education in Asia and the diversification of paths to doctoral training for Chinese scholars (Yang & Li, 2023).

Despite significant scholarly literature on international Doctoral education, most of the evidence relates to those who obtained their doctorates in Western countries, notably the USA, UK, and Australia. Compared to the more traditional hubs, there has been research into those that pursue doctoral education in Southeast Asia (Tran & Pham, 2021). Over the past few years, however, Southeast Asian universities are becoming a choice for doctoral study because of growing education collaborations within Asia, relatively liberal admissions, and expanding international academic networks (Lee, Sidhu, & Choi, 2020). As a result, an increasing number of Chinese scholars earn their PhD from these universities and subsequently enter the Chinese higher education system as staff. Nonetheless, the academic literature is quite scant on their professional development experiences.

The complex processes of identity negotiation, institutional adaptation and career development in international settings, are relevant in domestic academic systems. Professional identity is when individuals try to understand their roles, values, and responsibilities in a professional environment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022). The professional identity of teachers in higher education refers to the conceptions teachers hold about their role as an academic, their role as a teacher, their research mission, as well as their relationship with students, and with colleagues. The professional identity of an individual is not 'given', but rather something that is developed continuously through interactions with institutional environments, professional expectations and personal career pathways (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2020). For internationally trained scholars who return to their home countries, these processes may become especially complicated, given their cross-cultural experiences and different academic norms encountered during their doctorate training.

Teachers who obtained their doctoral degrees overseas face different issues when reentering Chinese institutions, and these are worthy of studying. Scholars who have participated in international training may acquire important academic insights and research capabilities (Huang & Turner, 2021). However, upon returning, they may experience tensions relating to different academic cultures, expectations and evaluation systems. Teachers may face stress or tension when reconstructing their professional identity and career decision-making. Earlier studies have revealed that returning academics often undergo a process of identity reconstruction whereby they reconcile their international academic experiences with local institutional expectations (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2022). Yet most literature has focused on Western-educated returnees and the experiences of scholars trained in Southeast Asia remains neglected.

Individuals with their doctoral background from Southeast Asia constitute a unique group of teachers in China. The academic experiences of Western-trained scholars have had greater cultural distance, educational system distance and socio-economic distance than those of non-West trained scholars across Asian countries (Tran & Nguyen, 2023). Still, they may face obstacles regarding institutional recognition, professional credibility and career advancement after going back to China. The professional commitment, sense of belonging, and professional development of academics may be impacted by such challenges.

The professional identity of teachers impacts their career development and job satisfaction. Teachers with a strong professional identity are likely to exhibit a higher degree of engagement, motivation and commitment (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2020). On the other hand, identity conflicts or lack of institutional recognition may result in low motivation, career dissatisfaction and even turnover intentions (Hiver & Dörnyei, 2021). Faculty members who have been trained outside of Canada often undergo an identity construction process. This is influenced by numerous contextual factors which include institutional support, professional opportunities, and cross-cultural adaptation experiences.

Cross-cultural adaptation is one of the key factors that determine the professional experience of internationally educated academics. The ability to make adjustments to cultural norms, communication channels, and organizational techniques is cross-cultural adaptation (Ward, Wilson, & Fischer, 2020). In adapting to Chinese university contexts, teachers returning home from southeast Asian doctoral programs must try to re-adjust again to Chinese academic systems while integrating their international experiences into their teaching and research. When teachers are able to adapt cross-culturally successfully, they integrate to perform their academic duties confidently.

Teacher self-efficacy is another important psychological factor influencing development of professional identity. Teacher self-efficacy are the beliefs teachers hold about their capabilities for organizing and executing teaching tasks. Teaching tasks refer to all the tasks that a teacher carries out in the classroom or outside of the classroom. These include teaching, engaging students, researching and assessing students (Zee & Koomen, 2021). High self-efficacy signifies stronger teaching

effectiveness, higher job satisfaction, and greater professional commitment and nearness to the profession. The self-efficacy of teachers with international doctoral backgrounds may be formed during their overseas studies, research experiences, and perceived competence in local contexts.

Institutional factors also shape teachers' professional development significantly. Perceived organizational support addresses employees' perceptions regarding extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2020). Organizational support in higher education refers to the availability of research resources, professional development opportunities, recognition from administration, and support from academic leadership. When teachers sense a strong organizational support, they become more positively oriented towards their institution and show a greater professional commitment.

Teachers who are professionally committed are psychologically attached to the teaching profession and undertake to remain in the profession (Meyer, Stanley, & Vandenberg, 2021). Professional commitment in academic contexts refers to educators' commitment to teaching, research and the broader mission of higher education. Returning teachers from international doctoral programmes could be influenced by personal motivations and institutional conditions in their professional commitment. When the academic environment is friendly, then there will be a commitment of the teachers. While there are institutional constraints, or a lack of recognition, there can be a weakening of the professional attachment.

The interplay between cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and professional commitment will form teachers' professional identity. As Beauchamp & Thomas (2022) would argue, professional identity refers to the teachers' internalized conception of who they think they are as educators and scholars and who they feel they are in the academic world. Possessing a strong professional identity facilitates teachers to tackle professional challenges effectively and stay motivated while pursuing long-term academic growth. Southeast Asian doctoral background teachers' professional identity may evolve because of their international exposure and domestic institution context dynamic interaction.

Not only do the aforementioned variables and their relationships among them differ hierarchically but they are also contextual in nature. The teaching experience length in China is one such factor. Teachers that worked in Chinese universities for a long time may be better placed to adapt to institutional environments, develop professional networking opportunities, and enhance their professional identification. As a result, years of teaching experience may influence how psychological and organisational factors relate to professional identity.

Another contextual factor would be the motivation for pursuing a doctoral study in Southeast Asia. Due to their preferred study interests, opportunity for international collaboration or favourable study conditions in the region, some scholars undertake doctoral research programs in Southeast Asia. Some people might opt for these programs due to practical reasons like accessibility, admission

requirements, & finances. Such reasons might shape teachers' perceptions of their doctoral experiences and result in the interpretations of their professional identity upon their entry into the Chinese academic system.

An increasing number of teachers in Chinese universities possessing doctoral degrees from Southeast Asia. However, not many empirical studies analyse the development of their professional identity. Prior research on academic returnees has centered on those trained in the West or more general issues of higher education internationalization. Thus, the literature has been deficient in examining the experiences of academics trained in Southeast Asia. It is essential to enhance the theoretical knowledge about the professional identity development of teachers. Also, their knowledge can help in the development of organizational policies regarding faculty recruitment, internationalization, and academic careers.

Hence, the study mostly aims to study the professional identity and career development of Southeast Asian doctoral degree holding teachers working at Chinese universities. The study specifically investigates the impact of cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support on teachers' professional commitment and their professional identity. Also, the study looks into the moderating influences of years of teaching experience in China and reasons for seeking a doctoral study in Southeast Asia.

The study enhances the quickly growing literature on teacher professional identity not only in international but also cross-cultural contexts by examining these relationships. It will also provide evidence that may allow universities to develop better supportive policies for internationally trained faculty members. As higher education increasingly globalizes, there is growing recognition of the importance of understanding the experiences of various academic groups.

Overall, this research underscores the value of incorporating psychological, organizational, and contextual viewpoints into the exploration of teacher professional identity. With a focus on teachers with a Southeast Asian doctoral background, the article sheds light on the ways in which international academic mobility shapes professional identity formation and career development in contemporary higher education systems.

Research Objectives

With the increasing globalization of higher education, a growing number of Chinese academics have obtained doctoral degrees from universities in Southeast Asia and subsequently entered the Chinese higher education system as faculty members. However, their professional identity development and career trajectories remain underexplored in existing research. Understanding how psychological, organizational, and contextual factors influence the professional identity of these teachers is important for both theoretical advancement and institutional policy development.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the professional identity formation and career

development of teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support influence teachers' professional commitment and professional identity. In addition, the study seeks to explore whether contextual factors, including years of teaching experience in China and motivations for pursuing doctoral studies in Southeast Asia, moderate the relationships among these variables.

Based on these considerations, the study pursues the following research objectives:

To examine the influence of cross-cultural adaptation on the professional identity of teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities.

To investigate the impact of teacher self-efficacy on the professional identity of these teachers.

To analyze the role of perceived organizational support in shaping teachers' professional identity.

To explore the mediating role of professional commitment in the relationships between cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and professional identity.

To examine whether years of teaching experience in China moderate the relationships between the independent variables and teachers' professional identity.

To investigate whether motivation for pursuing doctoral study in Southeast Asia moderates the relationships between the independent variables and teachers' professional identity.

Through achieving these objectives, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher professional identity development in cross-cultural academic contexts.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does cross-cultural adaptation influence the professional identity of teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities?

RQ2: How does teacher self-efficacy influence the professional identity of these teachers?

RQ3: What is the relationship between perceived organizational support and teachers' professional identity?

RQ4: Does professional commitment mediate the relationships between cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and teachers' professional identity?

RQ5: Does the number of years of teaching experience in China moderate the relationships between the independent variables (cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support) and professional identity?

RQ6: Does the motivation for pursuing doctoral study in Southeast Asia moderate the relationships between the independent variables and teachers' professional identity?

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Professional Identity of University Teachers

Professional identity has long been regarded as a key notion in the research about teacher development. It refers to the educator's knowledge of their own professional roles, responsibilities and values. A professional identity is not an individual possession nor is it something static; it is continuously produced and reproduced through interactions between experiences and institutions. According to Beauchamp and Thomas, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2020), professional identity is formed more and more so through social interaction as well as professional practice and organization in those social and professional environments. Professional identity in higher education institutions refers to teachers' perceptions of their multiple identities as educators, researchers, supervisors, and members of the academic community.

Research indicates that professional identity influences the job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and career commitment a teacher shows. According to Day, Gu, & Sammons (2020), teachers with a more robust professional identity display greater motivation, more profound involvement in teaching-related activities, and stronger perseverance against professional challenges. Having a weak professional identity can create uncertainty about one's career path affecting the professional confidence. Not only it effects the professional confidence but also leads to turnover intentions.

Enhanced complexity of professional identity formation due to globalization of higher education system. Faculty members who studied or worked abroad are usually exposed to diverse academic climates, pedagogic philosophies, and institutional expectations. Upon returning to their home countries, these scholars must reconceptualize their professional identity in a different academic environment (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2022). Often involves the integration of global academic experience with local institutional norms.

Obtaining a doctoral degree from a university in the Southeast Asian region, and entering higher education in China may enhance the professional identity development of the teachers. While regional cultural proximity may facilitate the adaptation processes in certain aspects, potential tensions may still exist due to differences in academic evaluation systems, institutional expectations, and research environments. As a result, it is crucial to examine the evolution of professional identity of this group of teachers to explain their career development.

Research shows that not only individual psychological factors but also organisational conditions contribute to professional identity formation. Cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support and professional commitment are some of the recognized factors

affecting teachers' professional identity development (Zee & Koomen, 2021; Kurtessis et al. 2020). These variables are the theoretical backbone of the present study.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Professional Identity

Cross-cultural adaptation refers to how people adjust their psyches and behaviors when interacting with different cultures. It means the ability to learn the new cultural practices and communicate effectively with people from other cultures in a new organisation system (Ward, Wilson, & Fischer, 2020). Cross-cultural adaptation by academics who studied in other countries and returned to their own countries can take place in various ways. Both must integrate their overseas experiences and re-adjust to domestic institutional environments.

In research on higher education, cross-cultural adaptation affects aspects of academic career development. According to Tran and Nguyen, (2023), scholars with solid intercultural competence can effectively negotiate institutional demands, cooperate productively with diverse colleagues, and facilitate the transfer of international knowledge into the local academy. This level of adaptability could boost teachers' confidence in performing their academic functions and enhance their professional identity.

Many practical investigations confirm this claim. For example, a study of international mobility among academics shows that adaptation to different academic cultures is significantly related to academic engagement and professional belonging among them (Huang & Turner, 2021). In a similar vein, research on returning scholars in Asia indicates that cross-cultural competence helps integrate overseas academic experience into domestic teaching and research (Yang & Li, 2023).

For teachers from Southeast Asian doctoral backgrounds with employment in Chinese universities, cross-cultural adaptation may involve reconciliation of different educational traditions and institutional practices. Teachers that are able to successfully integrate their international experiences into the local academic context may develop a stronger professional identity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Cross-cultural adaptation positively influences teachers' professional identity.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity

Teacher self-efficacy refers to one's belief in one's ability to influence student engagement and learning, a belief that can develop over time and influence behaviour and motivation, and can improve via experience, education, and other means. Self-efficacy is based on social cognitive theory which refers to the belief in one's capacity to produce a desired outcome by actions (Bandura, 2021). In their studies of education, teacher self-efficacy has been correlated with teaching effectiveness, professional satisfaction and commitment to teaching.

Recent evidence indicates that teacher self-efficacy influences professional identity considerably. Teachers who have high self-efficacy beliefs will see themselves as competent professionals. This strengthens their identification with teaching (Zee & Koomen, 2021). The

willingness to adopt innovative teaching strategies and engage in professional development activities is greatly influenced by self-efficacy.

In higher education, university teacher self-efficacy may improve academic research productivity and professional confidence. According to Hiver and Dörnyei (2021), faculty members with a strong belief that they could do academic tasks well were more likely to engage in research collaborations, publish scholarly output, and take part in academic networks. Stronger professional identities are evidently developed by experiences such as these.

Teachers with an international doctoral background may draw from their overseas experiences in academia in order to enhance their self-efficacy. When such teachers see themselves as capable of using their knowledge of the world in the local academic environment, their professional identity may become stronger.

Based on these theoretical and empirical considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Teacher self-efficacy positively influences teachers' professional identity.

Perceived Organizational Support and Professional Identity

Perceived organizational support can be defined as the employees' perception regarding how much organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being. Theories of organization support suggest that employee who perceive high organization support develop good attitude together with increased organizational commitment (Kurtessis et al., 2020).

The ways in which perceived organizational support can be offered to higher education institution's employees may include research resources, career development opportunities, supportive leadership, and evaluation systems. When teachers feel their institution is supportive of their professional development, they feel a stronger sense of belonging while identifying with their profession.

Researchers have recently revealed that organizational support is important for teachers' professional identity. According to research, educators actively participate in teaching and researching activities due to a helpful state of the institution (Day et al., 2020). On the flip side, the absence of institutional backing could send educators' professional identity into a downward spiral, which may land them further down the road from their academic profession.

Organizational support may be particularly useful for professors returning from international doctoral programs. Often, these teachers need institutional help to relate their international experience to local academic settings. Universities that offer assistance and encouragement may help with this integration process and improve teachers' professional identity development.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perceived organizational support positively influences teachers' professional identity.

Professional Commitment as a Mediating Mechanism

Professional commitment is the psychological attachment of individuals to their profession and

their willingness to continue to work on this professional field. In contrast to organizational commitment which is defined as an individual's loyalty to a particular organization, professional commitment concerns individuals' devotion to their profession (Meyer, Stanley, & Vandenberg, 2021).

In educational settings professional commitment closely related to teachers' purpose and career motivation. Teachers with a high level of professional commitment are often more involved in teaching, research and other professional activities. This kind of commitment enhances their identification with teaching and creates their professional identity.

Recent studies show that professional commitment may be an important mechanism linking individual and organizational factors to professional identity. Teachers who view themselves as receiving strong organizational support tend to exhibit greater professional commitment that enhances their professional identity (Han & Yin, 2022). Likewise, teachers with high self-efficacy show more commitment to their profession which leads to a stable professional identity.

Professional commitment may also be influenced by cross-cultural adaptation. Teachers who adapt to new academic environments are more likely to develop a sense of belonging to the professional community. The feeling of belongingness reaffirms their dedication to the teacher's profession.

Consequently, professional commitment may act as a mediator between cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and professional identity.

Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Cross-cultural adaptation positively influences professional commitment.

H5: Teacher self-efficacy positively influences professional commitment.

H6: Perceived organizational support positively influences professional commitment.

H7: Professional commitment positively influences teachers' professional identity.

Moderating Effects of Teaching Experience in China

Teaching experience is a recognized issue in teacher development. The professional identity, teaching confidence, and classroom management skills of experienced teachers are generally better. Teacher's Experience within Specific Institutions Increases Teacher Knowledge of Organisational Norms, Institutional Expectations and Professional Networks.

For internationally trained academics, the contribution of years of Chinese teaching experience may shape the nature of teachers' interpretation and application of their international academic experiences. Teachers with greater experience in Chinese universities may have had more opportunities to adapt to domestic academic systems and integrate overseas experiences into local teaching practices.

Thus, the association between an individual's psychological factors and professional identity may differ based on their teaching experience. In other words, the beneficial effects of self-efficacy or cross-cultural adaptation on professional identity may be stronger among teachers with more teaching experience in the Chinese academic context.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Years of teaching experience in China moderates the relationships between the independent variables and professional identity.

Moderating Effects of Motivation for Studying in Southeast Asia

The educational and professional path of individuals is influenced by motivation. Educational professionals from Southeast Asia who chose to pursue doctoral studies did so for various reasons including academic interest, internationalisation opportunities, or practical reasons such as accessibility and cost.

These motives may shape teachers' interpretations of their doctoral experience and their positioning in the academic profession after their return to China. Teachers who have intentionally gone into international doctoral training for professional growth may be more likely to integrate their international experiences into their professional identity. In contrast, those motivated more by pragmatism may have higher identity uncertainty.

Therefore, the relations of cross-cultural adaptation, self-efficacy, organizational support and professional identity may be moderated by motivation to study in Southeast Asia.

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Motivation for studying in Southeast Asia moderates the relationships between the independent variables and professional identity.

Research Methodology

Research Design

By employing a quantitative research design, this study determines the relationships among the five variables, namely cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, professional commitment, and professional identity of teachers with Southeast Asian doctorate degree at the Chinese universities. The use of quantitative approaches is best suited for assessing causal relationships between latent constructs and testing the hypotheses developed theoretically through statistical modeling (Hair et al. 2022). Given that the research involves a complex relationship between two to three variables along with mediators and moderators, the study opted for SEM.

The main analysis used in this study was Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) of various SEM techniques. When the goal is more oriented towards prediction and also, the models contain complicated interrelationships between multiple constructs, social science researchers prefer PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2020). PLS-SEM possesses several methodological advantages over covariance-based SEM. To begin with, it is appropriate in emerging research settings for exploratory or theory-building studies. Next, it can also handle complex models that involve mediating and moderating variables without strict normality assumptions. Essentially, it works reasonably well with fairly small sample sizes and is appropriate for the analysis of latent constructs.

In the present study, PLS-SEM enables the investigation of direct associations among independent variables and professional identity as well as indirect relationships through professional commitment. Moreover, the model evaluates moderating variables (years of teaching experience in China and motivation to study Southeast Asia) that may influence the structures. The analysis was performed using SmartPLS which is a popular software used for the implementation of PLS-SEM procedures in management, educational and social science (Hair et al., 2022).

Population and Sample

The sample of this study consists of Chinese university teachers with a doctoral degree from universities in Southeast Asia currently working at higher education institution in China. In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of Chinese scholars who receive their doctoral training in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines as a result of ongoing regional academic collaboration and initiatives for international education (Tran & Nguyen, 2023). The subsequent return of these scholars to China to take up academic posts in universities and colleges means they are an important group for the internationalization of Chinese higher education institutions.

The study targeted teachers working at public universities; private universities; and independent colleges across several provinces in China, to arrive at a representative sample of the population. The study captures both research universities and teaching institutes which allows for the different academic environments and institutional contexts.

For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the participant who meets the following criteria: the participant must have a doctoral degree obtained from a university in Southeast Asia; the participant must be a full-time teacher or faculty in a Chinese higher education institution; and, the participant must have at least one-year of teaching experience in China.

Studies that involve specialized populations commonly use purposive sampling. This is because the participants must possess specific characteristics that relate to the use of similar investigations. Because the profession of teachers with a Southeast Asian doctorate background is considered a specific group of academics, purposive sampling is a feasible way to find the appropriate respondents.

Talking about sample sizes requirement for PLS-SEM the, scholars suggest that the minimum sample size needs to be based on the complexity of the structural model, in other words. The minimum sample size in PLS-SEM research is commonly guided by the “10-times rule” and power analysis (Hair et al., 2022). In light of the fact that in this analysis there are latent variable and the structural model consists of several structural paths, a minimum size of around 200 is regarded reasonable. The study intends to obtain at least 300-400 valid responses from teachers working in Chinese Universities to improve the statistical reliability and reduce the sampling bias.

Overcoming Sampling Bias With Minimum Expected Survey Responses (300-400) from Teachers Working in Chinese Universities.

Data Collection

The structured questionnaire survey to collect data for the study was administered to teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees teaching at Chinese universities. The study adopted previously validated measurement instruments for the questionnaire but customized to the local context of higher education institutions in China.

The collection of data was done by many ways. Initially, the items of the questionnaire were translated and adjusted to achieve conceptual equivalence between the original scale and the Chinese academic context. The questionnaire was checked for content validity by experts in educational managers and higher education research. To increase clarity and relevance minor revisions were made.

Secondly, the pilot test was organized with a small sample of university teachers whose background was similar to that of the target population. Pilot testing can detect possible complications with the wording of the questionnaire which improves the reliability of measurement instruments (Hair et al., 2022). As per the pilot participants' feedback, several items were modified for clarity and ease of reading.

Once the final questionnaire was ready, it was sent to the survey through the web. Participants were invited to fill out the questionnaire voluntarily through electronic survey tools. Online surveys have been used widely in social science research for quite some time now as they allow researchers to reach respondents spread over a large area (Etikan & Bala, 2021).

Participation in the survey was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would be kept confidential. All responses were collected only for academic research purpose and no personally identifiable information were collected. The valid questionnaires, after excluding incomplete or invalid responses, were used for further statistical analyses.

Variable Measurement

All constructs in this study were measured using multi-item Likert-type scales, which are widely used in social science research to measure latent psychological constructs. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-cultural adaptation refers to teachers' ability to adjust to different cultural and institutional environments after completing doctoral studies abroad. The measurement items for cross-cultural adaptation were adapted from widely used scales assessing intercultural competence and sociocultural adjustment (Ward et al., 2020). These items assess respondents' ability to interact effectively within diverse cultural contexts and to adapt to institutional norms and practices.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy was measured using items adapted from the widely used Teacher Sense of Efficacy framework, which assesses teachers' confidence in their ability to perform teaching-related

tasks (Zee & Koomen, 2021). The scale captures teachers' beliefs about their ability to facilitate student learning, manage classroom activities, and perform academic responsibilities effectively.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support refers to teachers' perceptions of the degree to which their institutions value their contributions and support their professional development. Measurement items were adapted from the Perceived Organizational Support scale, which has been widely applied in organizational research (Kurtessis et al., 2020). These items assess teachers' perceptions of institutional support, recognition, and access to professional resources.

Professional Commitment

Professional commitment reflects teachers' psychological attachment to the teaching profession and their willingness to continue working within the academic field. Measurement items were adapted from established scales used to assess commitment to professional roles (Meyer et al., 2021). The items capture respondents' dedication to the teaching profession and their intention to remain in the academic career.

Professional Identity

Professional identity was measured using items reflecting teachers' self-perceptions regarding their professional roles, values, and sense of belonging within the academic community. These items were developed based on existing literature on teacher professional identity and higher education faculty development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022).

Moderating Variables

Two moderating variables were included in the model. Years of teaching in China was measured as the number of years respondents had been employed as teachers in Chinese universities. Motivation for studying in Southeast Asia was assessed through survey items capturing respondents' primary motivations for pursuing doctoral studies in Southeast Asian institutions.

Control variables such as gender, academic discipline, and institutional type were also included to account for potential background differences among respondents.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was carried out in stages that are consistent with PLS-SEM research. To begin with, respondents' demographic characteristics were first summarized and the distribution of responses studied through descriptive statistics, using SPSS. The sample profile was presented at this step to ensure that the data complied with selected requirements for analysis. Second, the estimate model was evaluated to assess reliability and validity of the constructs. The occurrence of various criteria in PLS-SEM analysis is prescribed. Thus, the criteria indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity must be examined (Hair et al. 2022).

The reliability of the indicators was assessed through factor loadings while the reliability of the internal consistencies was assessed using Cronbach alpha and composite reliability values. To

examine convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was used while the Fornell–Larcker and heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios enabled the evaluation of discriminating validity. The structural model was subsequently evaluated to test the relationships hypothesized among the variables. To measure the strength and the directions between the constructs, the path coefficients were estimated. These relationships were assessed using bootstrapping procedures which create resampled datasets to estimate standard errors and confidence intervals (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Indirect effect analysis using a PLS-SEM framework was employed to assess the mediating role of professional commitment. We utilized bootstrapping techniques to ascertain the significance of the indirect paths from the independent variables to professional identity via professional commitment. In closing, moderating effects were tested via the inclusion of interaction terms in the structural model. The study examined whether the relationship between independent variables and professional identity varies based on teachers’ years of teaching experience in China and their motivations to pursue a doctorate in Southeast Asia. This research utilizes analytical procedures that will help readers understand the development of professional identity of teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 350 valid questionnaires were obtained and included in the final dataset for statistical analysis. All respondents were university teachers currently employed in Chinese higher education institutions who had obtained their doctoral degrees from universities located in Southeast Asia. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 350)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	182	52.0
	Female	168	48.0
Age	30–35	96	27.4
	36–40	134	38.3
	41–45	78	22.3
	Above 45	42	12.0
Years of Teaching in China	1–3 years	88	25.1
	4–6 years	121	34.6
	7–10 years	97	27.7
	Above 10 years	44	12.6
Type of University	Public University	182	52.0
	Private University	118	33.7
	Independent College	50	14.3
Academic Discipline	Social Sciences	134	38.3
	Engineering & Technology	86	24.6
	Education	74	21.1
	Other Disciplines	56	16.0

The respondents' gender distribution is fair as discussed in Table 1. Males made up 52.0% of the total sample while females made up 48.0%. A sample consisting of fifty percent females and males reduce potential emergence of gender bias in data, which also implies that the sample is reasonably representative of university faculty members' genders in China.

The age-wise distribution indicates that most of the respondents are in the age group of 36–40 years (38.3%). The 30–35 years (27.4%) and 41–45 years (22.3%) age categories come next, while a decreasing proportion of respondents (12.0%) are above 45 years old. Based on these results, we can conclude that a majority of respondents are at the early or middle stages of their careers, similar to what is expected of teachers who were recently trained abroad in a doctorate before entering university employment.

Teaching experience in China also supports this interpretation of variation. Among the respondents, the most teaching experience years were (4–6 years) with 34.6 per cent. 27.7 per cent had 7–10 years, and 25.1 per cent had 1–3 years. Of the respondents, only 12.6% had more than ten years of teaching experience. A large number of Southeast Asian doctoral degree holders of teachers have recently arrived in China for academic work.

With respect to institutional affiliation, the sample consists of teachers working in diverse higher education institutions. Public university enrollment accounts for the highest share at 52.0%, with private universities at 33.7% and independent colleges at 14.3%. This distribution shows the different institutional contexts of teachers with doctoral degrees in Southeast Asia. In recent years, numerous private universities and independent colleges in China have actively recruited international scholars to enhance academic quality and strengthen international cooperation.

The participants in the study were from a range of disciplines. The social sciences made up the largest share with 38.3%, followed by engineering and technology (24.6%) and education sciences (21.1%). The distribution among various fields, suggests that teachers with a Southeast Asian doctoral degree are not just concentrated in one discipline.

In summary, the demographic profile suggests that the sample comprised teachers with a diverse profile in terms of age, institution, and academic discipline. The heterogeneity of the sample allows for a more representative dataset which provides a strong basis for structural equation model analysis.

Measurement Model Assessment

Before the examination of structural relationships among the constructs, the measurement model was evaluated to determine if the constructs were measured reliably and validly. The evaluation adhered to the normal protocol proposed for PLS-SEM evaluation such as assessing indicator reliability and internal consistency reliability and convergent validity.

The first stage involved an assessment of indicator reliability via estimation of factor loadings of assessment items. All items loaded more than the threshold of 0.70 and thus, all indicator items are

good measures of their respective underlying constructs. High indicator loadings imply that the measured variable is strongly indicative of the latent variable.

The assessment of internal consistency reliability was done using Cronbach's alpha and CR. The values of Cronbach's alpha were in the range of 0.887 and 0.914. The values of composite reliability were found between 0.918 to 0.936. The findings indicate that the measurement scales employed in the study have high internal consistency.

Convergent validity was assessed through examination of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct. The AVE values were between 0.652 and 0.711 which are more than the recommended value 0.50. Thus, this shows that each of the constructs is able to explain more than half of the variance of its indicators and thus confirms the satisfactory convergent validity.

The detailed results of the measurement model assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Measurement Model Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Cross-Cultural Adaptation (CCA)	0.892	0.921	0.661
Teacher Self-Efficacy (SE)	0.901	0.928	0.684
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.914	0.936	0.711
Professional Commitment (PC)	0.887	0.918	0.652
Professional Identity (PI)	0.906	0.932	0.695

The results reported in Table 2 demonstrate that all constructs meet the recommended thresholds for reliability and convergent validity. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha values indicate that the items measuring each construct are internally consistent. Similarly, the composite reliability values confirm that the latent constructs are measured with high reliability.

The AVE values further indicate that the constructs exhibit strong convergent validity. This means that the indicators associated with each construct share a high proportion of common variance, suggesting that they effectively measure the intended theoretical concepts.

Overall, the results of the measurement model assessment confirm that the constructs in this study are measured reliably and validly. Therefore, the analysis proceeded to the evaluation of the structural model in order to test the proposed hypotheses.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Following the validation of the measurement model, the structural model was examined to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The structural model analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, which is commonly used in PLS-SEM analysis to assess the significance of path coefficients.

The results of the structural model analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	CCA \rightarrow PI	0.247	4.382	<0.001	Supported
H2	SE \rightarrow PI	0.221	3.965	<0.001	Supported
H3	POS \rightarrow PI	0.273	4.714	<0.001	Supported
H4	CCA \rightarrow PC	0.236	3.874	<0.001	Supported
H5	SE \rightarrow PC	0.261	4.129	<0.001	Supported
H6	POS \rightarrow PC	0.298	4.986	<0.001	Supported
H7	PC \rightarrow PI	0.314	5.321	<0.001	Supported
H8	SE \times YTC \rightarrow PI	0.112	2.467	0.014	Supported
H9	CCA \times MSEA \rightarrow PI	0.128	2.583	0.010	Supported

Table 3 shows the outcomes of the structural model computation. It includes the standardized causal path coefficients, t-values outcome, p-values outcome and hypothesis outcome. The analysis of the PLS-SEM employed the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to assess the significance of relationships.

As per the analysis, cross-cultural adaptation has a significant positive effect on professional identity ($\beta=0.247$; $p < 0.001$). Teachers who are better able to adapt to various cultural and institutional environments are more likely to develop a stronger sense of professional identity in Chinese universities. Hence, Hypothesis 1 receives support.

Teacher self-efficacy also shows a statistically significant positive association with professional identity ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. This means that teachers with a high level of confidence (in their ability to teach, academic competence and professional capability) are more likely to see themselves as effective professionals and identify more with their academic roles.

Likewise, perceived organizational support is significantly and positively related to professional identity ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.001$). The finding indicates that teachers' professional identity is shaped by the institutional support received. When teachers believe their universities value them and offer sufficient professional resources and support, they display a greater sense of belonging and professional identity. The results support Hypothesis 3.

The independent variables also show a significant relationship with professional commitment, according to the structural model. Cross-cultural adaptation has a significant and positive influence on professional commitment ($\beta = 0.236$, $p < 0.001$). Further, teachers who successfully adapt to their academic environment will have a greater professional commitment. This finding bolsters the support for Hypothesis 4. Furthermore, teacher self-efficacy has a statistically significant and positive effect on professional commitment ($\beta = 0.261$, $p < 0.001$), which also confirms Hypothesis 5. Teachers who are more confident in their professional abilities are more committed to their academic career.

Perceived organizational support ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$) among others, appears to have the strongest impact on professional commitment reflecting that institutional support would help teachers

to make long term commitment with teaching profession. As a result, Hypothesis 6 is supported. Furthermore, professional commitment has shown a significant positive impact on professional identity ($\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.001$); Hypothesis 7 is confirmed. Meaning, teachers with strong commitment to the teaching profession are more likely to have stable and positive professional identity.

Alongside direct relationships, this model also takes moderation effects into account. The combination of teacher self-efficacy and years of teaching in China ($SE \times YTC$) significantly positively affects professional identity ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.014$). The finding reveals that teaching experience strengthens the impact of self-efficacy on professional identity. Teacher with more teaching experience within Chinese universities seem to be better able to transform their competence into a stronger professional identity. Thus, we accept Hypothesis 8.

The significant effect on professional identity is also caused by interaction cross cultural adaptation and motivation study in Southeast Asia ($CCA \times MSEA$) with value ($\beta = 0.128$, $p = 0.010$).

The more teachers' motivations for studying in Southeast Asia are intrinsically oriented, such as related to academic development and international academic collaboration, the stronger the positive effect of cross-cultural adaptation on professional identity. As a result, Hypothesis 9 is supported.

In summary, the findings presented in Table 3 suggest that both psychological factors of teachers' (cross-cultural adaptation and self-efficacy) and an organizational factor (perceived organizational support) lead to teachers' professional commitment and professional identity. In addition, contextual factors pertaining to career experience and educational motivation further influence the relationship associations.

However, the results of analysis of structural model provide several important findings. First, findings reveal that individual psychological factors and organizational factors influence teachers' professional identity immensely. Cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, and perceived organizational support have positive impacts on both professional commitment and professional identities.

The professional commitment is a mediating mechanism which links individual and organizational factors with professional identity. The following insights can be highlighted: Professionally committed teachers are more likely to develop a stable and positive professional identity.

The moderation analysis revealed that contextual factors related to teachers' careers also shape professional identities. Teaching experience in China strengthens the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity, while motivation to study in Southeast Asia enhances the influence of cross-cultural adaptation on professional identity.

Discussion

Overview of Key Findings

This study looked at the professional identity formation and career paths of teachers with

Southeast Asian doctoral degrees in Chinese universities. By combining cross-cultural adaptation theory, social cognitive theory, and organizational support theory, the study examined the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, professional commitment and professional identity. Furthermore, the analysis investigated the moderating effects of years of teaching experience within China and the motivations for undertaking doctoral studies within Southeast Asia.

The data indicate various important patterns. First, teacher self-efficacy, perceived organizational support, and cross-cultural adaptation all significantly and positively influence teachers' professional identity. Secondly, professional commitment operates as a mediator linking these to professional identity. Third, contextual factors like teaching experience and motivated education can strengthen some model relationships. The results indicate how psychologists, organization and situation alike proceed to affect the professional identity of the internationally trained academy.

The findings of this study add to the growing corpus of literature on the professional experiences of internationally mobile scholars and offer new insights into the career trajectories of those awarded PhDs by universities in Southeast Asia. The current study demonstrates that the same identity-formation mechanisms operate on scholars trained within regional higher education systems in Southeast Asia, unlike in previous studies, which focused on Western trained-returnees.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Professional Identity

The findings indicate that teachers with doctoral degrees from Southeast Asia can predict their professional identity. This result supports Hypothesis 1: Teachers' movement between various contexts likely contributes to a robust professional identity within Chinese universities.

These findings are consistent with previous studies about transnational academic mobility . Experts are learning that returnees from international education negotiate their identities as they reconcile their overseas experience and academic norms at home (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2022). The adaption to different cultures allows people to read and absorb different academic cultures. Thus, attaining professional integration.

Theoretical definitions of cross-cultural adaptation in Ward et al. (2020) include psychological adjustment as well as sociocultural learning. With the help of teachers with strong intercultural competence that can help us to understand the institutional expectations, communicate with the colleague and adapt them to the local context. These skills foster the development of professional confidence and help teachers identify better with their professional role.

These findings are also consistent with recent studies of international doctoral graduates in Asia. According to Tran and Nguyen (2023), internationally mobile scholars frequently perform the role of knowledge intermediaries who transfer ideas, research methods, and teaching approaches. Teachers who adapt well to different cultures are more likely to transfer those experiences into their professional practice.

Cross-cultural adaptation in the context of Chinese higher education might include the matching of global institutional experiences and domestic institutional expectations. Teachers back from doctoral programs in Southeast Asia may find differences in research assessment systems, modes of teaching and academic governance systems. By dealing with these differences successfully, teachers construct a coherent professional identity which combines international and national academic stances.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity

An additional finding of teacher self-efficacy is the influence on teacher professional identity. Teachers will develop stronger professional identities if they have more confidence in both their teaching and research abilities.

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs influence motivation, performance and persistence and the current results support the theory (Bandura, 2021). The sense of self-efficacy determines how people confront problems, set goals and evaluate their professional capabilities.

Across fields of educational research, the positive professional outcomes of high teacher self-efficacy have been consistently noted. Teachers who have strong self-efficacy beliefs demonstrate more effective instruction, better classroom management, and higher levels of student engagement. Zee and Koomen (2021). Teachers who are self-efficacious are more likely to engage in innovative teaching techniques and show willingness to participate in training activities.

Within higher education, teacher self-efficacy includes productivity in research, cooperativeness in academic and other scholarly activities, besides classroom teaching. Faculty members who have confidence in their ability to fulfill academic duties effectively are more motivated to engage in research activities, publish articles, and join international academic networks.

Self-efficacy of teachers with international doctoral training may be shaped by overseas academic experience. The different kinds of teaching and research atmosphere, and academic networks may build teachers' confidence in their profession. These teachers' self-efficacy beliefs when coming back to Chinese universities might help them deal with institutional challenges and enhance their professional identity.

Perceived Organizational Support and Professional Identity

The findings also demonstrate that perceived organizational support plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' professional identity. Teachers who perceive higher levels of institutional support are more likely to develop stronger professional identities and greater commitment to their academic careers.

This result is consistent with organizational support theory, which posits that employees who perceive their organizations as supportive and appreciative are more likely to develop positive work attitudes and stronger organizational attachment (Kurtessis et al., 2020). In academic settings, organizational support may include research funding, professional development opportunities,

mentoring programs, and fair evaluation systems.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of institutional environments in shaping teachers' professional identity. Day et al. (2020) found that supportive leadership and collaborative institutional cultures contribute to teachers' well-being and professional development. Similarly, Han and Yin (2022) reported that organizational support enhances teacher motivation and job satisfaction.

For teachers with international academic backgrounds, organizational support may be particularly important during the transition into domestic academic environments. Universities that provide supportive policies and resources can facilitate the integration of internationally trained scholars and enable them to apply their international experiences effectively.

The Mediating Role of Professional Commitment

The study further demonstrates that professional commitment mediates the relationships between cross-cultural adaptation, self-efficacy, organizational support, and professional identity. This finding suggests that professional commitment serves as an important psychological mechanism through which individual and organizational factors influence identity development.

Professional commitment reflects individuals' emotional attachment to their profession and their willingness to continue working within that field (Meyer et al., 2021). Teachers who demonstrate strong professional commitment are more likely to invest time and effort in teaching, research, and professional development activities.

The mediating role of professional commitment highlights the importance of professional motivation in shaping identity development. Teachers who feel committed to their profession are more likely to interpret their experiences in ways that reinforce their professional identity.

Moderating Role of Teaching Experience

The results also indicate that years of teaching experience in China strengthen the relationship between self-efficacy and professional identity. This finding suggests that teaching experience enhances teachers' ability to translate their professional confidence into a stable professional identity.

Experienced teachers often possess deeper knowledge of institutional norms and professional networks. As teachers gain experience within the academic system, they become more capable of integrating their professional competencies into their career development.

Moderating Role of Motivation for Studying in Southeast Asia

Finally, the findings reveal that motivation for pursuing doctoral studies in Southeast Asia moderates the relationship between cross-cultural adaptation and professional identity. Teachers who pursued doctoral education with stronger academic motivations are more likely to integrate their international experiences into their professional identities.

This result highlights the importance of educational motivations in shaping academic career trajectories. Scholars who pursue international education for academic development may be more motivated to engage in scholarly activities and contribute to institutional development.

Conclusions

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on teacher professional identity and international academic mobility in several ways.

First, the study extends the theoretical framework of teacher professional identity by integrating cross-cultural adaptation, self-efficacy, and organizational support within a single conceptual model. Previous studies have often examined these variables separately; the present study demonstrates how they interact to influence professional identity formation.

Second, the study contributes to research on international academic mobility by focusing on scholars trained in Southeast Asia. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on Western-educated returnees, leaving regional academic mobility relatively understudied. The findings highlight the growing importance of regional higher education networks in shaping academic career development.

Third, the study enriches the theoretical understanding of professional commitment as a mediating mechanism linking individual and organizational factors with professional identity. This perspective highlights the importance of professional motivation in shaping academic career trajectories.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for higher education institutions.

First, universities should develop policies that support the integration of internationally trained scholars into domestic academic environments. Mentoring programs, professional development workshops, and research collaboration initiatives can facilitate this integration process.

Second, institutions should provide adequate organizational support for faculty members. Access to research funding, academic resources, and supportive leadership can enhance teachers' professional development and strengthen their professional identity.

Third, universities should encourage cross-cultural collaboration and international academic exchange. By fostering inclusive academic environments, institutions can help internationally trained scholars leverage their global experiences to contribute to institutional development.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations.

First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into how professional identity evolves over time.

Second, the data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may introduce potential response bias. Future studies may incorporate qualitative methods or multi-source data to

enhance the validity of the findings.

Third, the study focused specifically on teachers with Southeast Asian doctoral degrees working in Chinese universities. While this focus provides valuable insights, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other international academic groups.

Future Research Directions

Future research may explore several directions to extend the findings of this study.

First, longitudinal research could examine how professional identity evolves across different stages of academic careers. Such studies could provide deeper insights into the dynamic processes of identity formation.

Second, comparative studies could examine differences between teachers trained in Southeast Asia and those trained in Western countries. This approach would help identify how different educational systems influence academic career development.

Third, qualitative research could explore the lived experiences of internationally trained scholars in greater depth. Interviews and case studies may reveal nuanced insights into identity negotiation and career development.

Finally, future studies could examine additional contextual factors such as institutional culture, academic leadership, and research evaluation systems that may influence professional identity development.

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