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**Trust Building in Multinational Enterprises: The Case of  
Sino-German Subordinate-Supervisor Relations**

**ABSTRACT**

Enriching interpersonal cross-cultural trust literature with acculturation theory, our explorative, qualitative study reveals why, how and under which circumstances (collectivist) Chinese subordinates either succeed or fail in forming and developing trust to their (individualist) German supervisors. Our analysis is based on 95 semi-structured interviews with Chinese subordinates of German supervisors and German supervisors of Chinese subordinates both in China and in Germany. Our study uncovers a three phase process model (comprising the contact, disillusion and acculturation phase), ultimately resulting in either establishment or erosion of trust. Our findings disclose that central propositions of seminal (Western) trust concepts are turned upside down, once the focus moves from an exclusively Western cultural setting to one that also includes East Asian contexts. As such, our study exposes important boundary conditions of influential trust concepts and contributes to research on the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern management concepts.