

# HARNESSING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE: CHINESE EXPATRIATES LEADING THE WAY IN INNOVATION

Nikola Zivlak <sup>1</sup> [ORCID 0000-0002-5425-7464], Zoe Reichman <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Emlyon business school, France

**Abstract:** *In 1978, China embraced globalization, and opened its doors to the world. As a result, the Chinese economy has experienced significant global growth, leading to an increased integration of Chinese workers in international businesses. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Innovation by examining Chinese expatriates, individuals of Chinese origin who live and work abroad. Innovative Work Behavior was used to further explain the link between Cultural Intelligence and Innovation; and Creativity was used as a mediator between Cultural Intelligence and Innovative Work behavior. For our research methodology we used a survey aimed for Chinese expatriates measuring Cultural Intelligence, Creativity, Innovative Work Behavior and Organizational Innovation. We hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Innovative Work Behavior, Creativity mediates the effect of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior and that Innovative Work Behavior is positively associated with Organizational Innovation. It was found that Chinese expatriates with specific qualities had more innovative capabilities that enabled them to bring innovation to organizations and help them become more sustainable in a highly competitive global economy.*

**Keywords:** Chinese expatriates, Cultural Intelligence, Creativity, Innovative Work Behavior, Innovation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization refers to the integration of economies worldwide through cross-border trade, investment, and production (Lattermann *et al.*, 2012). It is an initiative embraced by countries throughout the world to facilitate the exchange of economic goods and processes. In 1978, China decided to open its economy to the world and started the process of its economic reform (Bell, 1993). China started to create trade and investment partnerships with economies around the world, no longer depending solely on its internal business affairs. This "opening up" strategy proved highly successful, as China transformed from a poor nation to the third largest economy globally within three decades (Yueh, 2010). As of 2023, China stands as the second largest economy, following the United States (Largest Economies in the World, 2023). To clarify, a country's economy is measured by its GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which represents the total value of all finished goods and services produced within its borders during a specific time period (Fernando, 2022).

With the rapid globalization of companies and organizations, there has been an increasing demand for globalized and international employees, commonly known as expatriates. Expatriates are individuals who live and work outside their country of origin. For instance, Chinese expatriates are Chinese individuals who work and live outside of China. Expatriates can be from anywhere in the world and can work anywhere in the world, Chinese can work in the United States, French can work in Israel, British can work in China and so on. The research on expatriates is still developing, as the combination of individuals from different countries in different cultural settings offers endless possibilities for cross-cultural research. For example, Wang, Fan, Freeman, and Zhu (2017) examined the cross-cultural skills necessary for Chinese expatriate managers that work in different countries.

There is a lack of research specifically focusing on Chinese expatriates. Existing literature on expatriates and China mainly explores the experiences and adaptation of Westerners working in China, such as coping strategies of business expatriates (Selmer, 2002), psychological well-being of expatriates (Wang and Kanungo, 2004), language barriers faced by Westerners (Selmer, 2006), and experiences, opportunities, and challenges encountered by expatriates in China (Boncori, 2013). Studies on Chinese expatriates in academic literature often examine their interactions with different cultures and their management. It seems there is a research gap when it comes to studying the challenges, experiences, competencies, and characteristics unique to Chinese expatriates. In other words, most research addressing Chinese expatriates focuses on their relationships with other actors, such as managers or colleagues, rather than exploring their own variables. This research aims to fill this gap by specifically focusing on Chinese

expatriates and investigating how Cultural Intelligence, Creativity and Innovative Work Behavior may influence their capacity for innovation.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 Sample and Data Collection

This study was conducted on Chinese expatriates- Chinese that live and work abroad. The focus was on Chinese expatriates without specific consideration for the country of work or the type of company. The participants were both employees and managers. A total of 113 responses were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 51 questions divided into four parts: General information (age, gender, country of work, years working at the current job), Cultural Intelligence, Creativity, Innovative Work Behavior, and Organizational Innovation. The questionnaire was written in both English and Chinese. Data collection involved distributing the questionnaire to Chinese expatriate groups and on social media platforms, as well as sending private messages through a social platform.

The majority of respondents fell within the age range of 18-30 years (79%), followed by 10% between 31-40 years, 7% between 41-50 years, and the remaining respondents were 51 years or older. Among the sample, 60% were female and 40% were male. The respondents represented a diverse range of countries where they worked, with the majority located in France (34.5%) and the United States (20%). Additionally, 12% worked in Israel, 5% in the UK and Luxembourg, and a small percentage worked in other countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Switzerland, Singapore, and more, totaling 25 countries. Regarding the duration of employment at their current job, the majority of respondents (57.5%) had been working for less than a year, while 26.5% had worked for 1-5 years, 8% for 5-10 years, and 8% for more than 10 years. Given that the largest age group of respondents was 18-30 years old, it is not surprising that many of them had been in their current jobs for less than a year, potentially indicating recent graduates entering the workforce.

### 2.2 Measures

*Cultural Intelligence (CQ)*: The 20 statements Cultural Intelligence Scale Self Report developed by Ang and Van Dyne (2015) was used in this study. In their research, CQ was divided into 4 dimensions: Metacognitive CQ- Mental Capabilities, Cognitive CQ, Motivational CQ, and Behavioral CQ. Each dimension contains 4 to 6 statements to be rated on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). One example of a statement is "I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me."

*Creativity*: 7 items from George and Zhou (2001) 13-items 7 points scale self-report were used in this study. The scale was from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A sample of an item is: "I suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives."

*Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)*: The 17 items that were used in this study were developed by De Jong and Den Hartog (2010). They divide IWB to three constructs: Participative Leadership, External Work Contacts and Innovative Output. For each construct they provide between 5 to 6 statements to be rated from 1 (Never) to 7 (All the Time). A sample of a statement under the Innovative Output construct is: "In your job, how often do you make suggestions to improve current products or services?". The 6 statements under the Participative Leadership construct were optional in the case the individual does not have a superior.

*Organizational Innovation*: Three questions were introduced to measure Organizational Innovation. The questions were taken from the OECD Community Innovation Survey (CIS) which is the reference survey on innovation in enterprises. In this part of this research questionnaire, it was asked to state whether an innovative activity described was introduced in the participant's place of work or not in the past 5 years (2018-2023). For example: new business practices for organizing procedures were introduced (for example: first time use of supply chain management, business re-engineering, knowledge management, etc.). The answers were: "Yes", "No" or "I don't Know".

### 2.3 Hypotheses Development

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is the ability of an individual to understand gestures that are not necessarily from within their own culture or country of origin. In essence, Cultural Intelligence is a valuable attribute that enables individuals to engage and immerse themselves in unfamiliar cultures, thereby presenting an opportunity for personal growth and the acquisition of knowledge. Having a high level of CQ promotes effective communication among peers, facilitating the exchange of unique ideas, perspectives, and

approaches (Afsar et al., 2020). In this paper, we argue that the qualities associated with a high CQ contribute to the display of innovative work behavior by Chinese expatriates. Individuals with high CQ exhibit effectiveness both within their own culture and across different cultures (Ng and Early, 2006), enabling them to interact skillfully with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and navigate various cultural contexts (Brislin et al., 2006).

Leveraging these skills, it is argued that individuals can generate novel ideas and successfully implement them with the support of their peers, which can ultimately lead to new and improved product or business process in an organization that differs from the product or process that was introduced before. Consequently, we argue that innovative work behavior of employees directly contributes to organizational innovation. Specifically, within the context of this study, organizational innovation refers to the implementation of novel ideas and practices that bring about changes and advancements within the organization.

*H1: Cultural Intelligence is positively related to Innovative Work Behavior*

*H2: Innovative Work Behavior is positively related to Organizational Innovation*

Ang and Van Dyne (2015) have developed a multidimensional construct for Cultural Intelligence that divides CQ into four groups, each group relates to a specific dimension of CQ: (1) Metacognitive CQ- mental capabilities to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, (2) Cognitive CQ- reflects general knowledge and knowledge constructs about culture, (3) Motivational CQ- reflects individual's intent to invest energy toward learning about and functioning in intercultural situations, (4) Behavioral CQ- reflects the capability of an individual to present appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions in cross-cultural interactions.

Past research has found that metacognitive, cognitive and motivational CQ were positively associated with creativity (Yunlu et al., 2017). We argue that CQ and its different dimensions allow individuals to explore and acquire knowledge that can be reintegrated into a new and innovative form which is the definition of creative work (Stein, 1953). To explain further, a high level of CQ helps individuals to navigate effectively in multicultural environments by self-awareness, general and specific knowledge and motivation to immerse in non-native cultures (MacNab et al., 2012).

These actions an individual does to develop high CQ can make expatriates feel more at ease and positive at the workplace due to better ability to communicate, understanding the culture and its cues and even having the motivation to learn more. Connecting to that, creativity occurs when individuals feel safe, positive and at ease (Claxton 1997). Creativity is the generation of novel ideas and innovation is the implementation of ideas (West, 2000), creativity is also a part of innovative work behavior where employees recognize gaps and initiate ideas to fill the need for innovation (Afsar et al., 2014).

*H3: CQ is positively associated with Creativity*

*H4: Creativity is positively associated with Innovative Work Behavior*

*H5: Creativity mediates the effect of CQ on IWB*

### **3. RESULTS**

#### **3.1 Structural Model**

In the figure below, a comprehensive structural model was constructed to facilitate the execution of this research study. This model served as a framework that guided the entire investigation. By adhering to this model, we were able to formulate relevant hypotheses related to their research objectives. These hypotheses were subsequently extracted from the model and subjected to testing and analysis.

By employing this systematic approach, we ensured a well-organized and thorough investigation, enhancing the credibility and reliability of our findings. The use of a structural model provided a solid foundation for the research study and contributed to its overall success in achieving its objectives.

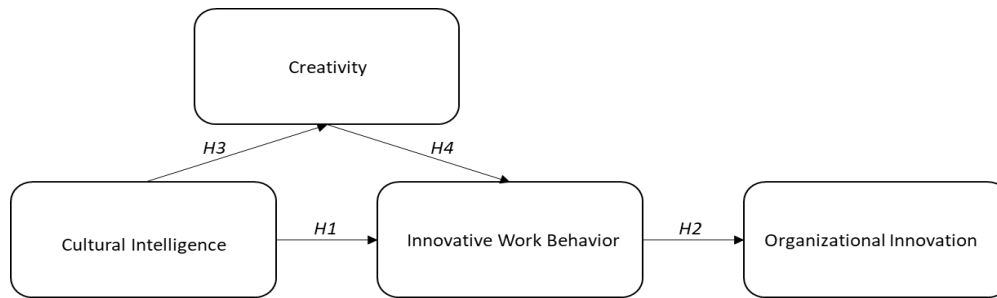


Figure 3.1: Structural model and hypotheses

### 3.2 Measurement Model

Prior to examining the hypothesized relationships among the constructs of this study, a reliability test was run to ensure the validity of the measurement items. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each set of questions associated with our variables, in order to ascertain the internal consistency of the items within each construct. In Table 1 we can clearly observe that all of our variables have a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7. This implies that the items within each construct exhibit a high degree of reliability and are well-correlated with each other. This demonstrates a strong level of internal consistency within our measures, validating their utility in subsequent analyses. It is also indicative of the quality of our data and the robustness of the relationships between each item within its respective variable. Based on these results, we can confidently move forward with further analyses using these variables, as they are likely to yield reliable and valid outcomes.

Table 3.1: Reliability Statistics. Cronbach's Alpha calculation for the construct model variables.

| Variable                  | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Cultural Intelligence     | 0.864            | 20         |
| Creativity                | 0.878            | 7          |
| Innovative Work Behavior  | 0.904            | 17         |
| Organizational Innovation | 0.755            | 3          |

### 3.3 Hypotheses Testing

To test our hypotheses, we used linear regression. Hypothesis 1 proposed that Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is positively related to Innovative Work Behavior (IWB). As we can see at Table 3.1, it was found that CQ significantly predicts IWB and accounts for about 11% of its variance. Meaning, 11% of the variance of IWB can be explained by CQ. The beta coefficient is 0.474 which means that for every one-unit increase in Cultural Intelligence, we can expect a 0.474 increase in Innovative Work Behavior, holding all other variables constant. The f ANOVA statistic is 13.727 with a significance level of less than 0.001. This is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, indicating that the regression model predicts the outcome variable significantly well.

The results also demonstrate that IWB significantly predicts Organizational Innovation (OI) and accounts for about 13.2% of its variance as it was proposed by Hypothesis 2. Meaning, 13.2% of the variance of OI can be explained by IWB. The beta coefficient of H2 is 0.263 which means that for every one-unit increase in Innovative Work Behavior, we can expect a 0.263 increase in Organizational Innovation, holding all other variables constant. The f ANOVA statistic is 16.891 with a significance level of less than 0.001. At a 95%

confidence level, the statistical significance indicates that the regression model effectively predicts the outcome variable.

For Hypothesis 3 and 4 it was proposed that CQ is positively related to Creativity (CR) and Creativity is positively related to IWB respectively. For Hypothesis 3 it was found that CQ significantly predicts CR and accounts for about 13.5% of its variance. Meaning CQ can explain 13.5% of Creativity variance. The beta coefficient of H3 is 0.368 which means that for every one unit increase in Cultural Intelligence, we can expect a 0.368 increase in Creativity. The f ANOVA statistic is 17.370 with a significance level of less than 0.001. This tells us that the regression model we are utilizing to predict Creativity from Cultural Intelligence is statistically significant, implying that the independent variable is relevant.

For Hypothesis 4 we found that CR significantly predicts IWB and accounts for about 41.6% of its variance. Meaning Creativity can explain almost 50% of IWB variance. The beta coefficient of H4 is 0.645 which means that for every one unit increase in Creativity, we can expect a 0.645 increase in Innovative Work Behavior. The f ANOVA statistic is 79.147 with a significance level of less than 0.001, pointing to a statistically significant regression model. This finding indicates the relevance of Creativity in predicting Innovative Work Behavior.

Table 3.2: Results of Hypotheses Testing, H1-4 (NOTES: CQ- Cultural Intelligence, IWB- Innovative Work Behavior, OI- Organizational Innovation, CR- Creativity)

| Hypothesis  | b       | f        | R2    |
|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| CQ-IWB (H1) | 0.474** | 13.727** | 0.110 |
| IWB-OI (H2) | 0.263** | 16.891** | 0.132 |
| CQ-CR (H3)  | 0.368** | 17.370** | 0.135 |
| CR-IWB (H4) | 0.645** | 79.147** | 0.416 |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

Hypothesis 5 proposed that Creativity acts as a mediator between Cultural Intelligence and Innovative Work Behavior. To test this hypothesis, two models were utilized, as presented in Table 3.3: Model one (M1) examined the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Creativity, while Model two (M2) investigated the association between Creativity and Innovative Work Behavior.

Table 3.3: Results of Hypotheses Testing, H5 (NOTES: CQ- Cultural Intelligence, IWB- Innovative Work Behavior, CR- Creativity)

| Model       | R2      |
|-------------|---------|
| CQ-CR (M1)  | 0.1353* |
| CR-IWB (M2) | 0.4266* |

| Mediation Effect H5 | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|---------------------|----------|----------|
| CQ-CR-IWB           | 0.1444*  | 0.5262*  |

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

In the first model (M1), where Creativity was the outcome variable, a statistically significant positive association was observed with Cultural Intelligence, with an R-squared value of 0.1353. This implies that approximately 13.53% of the variance in Creativity can be explained by Cultural Intelligence. Moving on to

the second model (M2), where Innovative Work Behavior was the outcome variable, the model yielded an R-squared value of 0.4266, indicating that it explains a substantial proportion of approximately 42.66% of the variance in Innovative Work Behavior.

A bootstrap test was then conducted to assess the direct effect of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior and its indirect effect through Creativity. The results showed that the direct effect of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.1624$ ), as its confidence interval includes zero. However, the indirect effect of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior through Creativity was found to be statistically significant, as the confidence interval did not include zero. This implies that when the mediating variable, Creativity, is taken into account, there is a significant indirect effect of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior. These findings suggest that while Cultural Intelligence may not directly impact Innovative Work Behavior, it can positively influence it through its effect on enhancing Creativity. Thus, enhancing Cultural Intelligence could potentially lead to increased Innovative Work Behavior by fostering greater levels of Creativity.

Two different tests were run to analyze the hypotheses of this study: linear regression and a bootstrap. The two tests yielded contradictory results. When regression was run it was found that cultural intelligence significantly predicts innovative work behavior. Surprisingly, when a bootstrap test was run it was found that the direct effect of cultural intelligence on innovative work behavior was not statistically significant but the indirect effect through creativity was found significant. That is to show that while the link between cultural intelligence and innovative work behavior in the Chinese expatriates' community exists, it can be enhanced through creativity.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Cultural Intelligence has received attention across various research fields, exploring its effects on interpersonal trust in multicultural teams (Rockstuhl and Ng, 2015), cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance (Ang *et al.*, 2007), and expatriate performance (Lee and Sukoco, 2010), among others. Recent research has further explored the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Innovation. Drawing data from 113 Chinese expatriates working in 25 countries, this study supports the notion that Cultural Intelligence influences Expatriates' Innovative Work Behavior, corroborating the findings of Afsar *et al.* (2020) and Li *et al.* (2021).

Additionally, the study confirms the link between Cultural Intelligence and Creativity, as previously examined by Yunlu *et al.* (2017). This research expands the literature on the connection between Cultural Intelligence, Innovative Work Behavior, and Creativity, particularly focusing on Chinese expatriates, a novel area of investigation with no prior research on this specific group.

Furthermore, the study highlights a noteworthy correlation between expatriates' creativity and their innovative work behavior. Past research by Bagheri *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that individual and team creativity can enhance employees' innovative work behavior by encouraging engagement in creative activities and implementing innovative ideas within the organization. By incorporating Cultural Intelligence as a catalyst, this study adds to the existing literature on the relationship between creativity and innovative work behavior.

The research also reveals that expatriates' innovative work behavior significantly impacts organizational innovation. The hypothesis is grounded in the definition of Innovative Work Behavior, which encompasses transforming the fundamental principles of organizational work.

Existing academic discourse on Innovative Work Behavior has explored its associations with different factors, such as transformational leadership (Afsar *et al.*, 2014) and personality traits (Woods *et al.*, 2018). This study goes beyond viewing Innovative Work Behavior solely as an end product, considering it as a mediator leading to actual organizational innovation.

Finally, this research stands among the pioneers in examining the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Innovation, specifically using Chinese expatriates as the sample data. It provides empirical evidence of the significantly positive impact of Cultural Intelligence on Innovative Work Behavior through Creativity.

Additionally, the study establishes that Chinese Expatriates' Cultural Intelligence, in conjunction with Creativity and Innovative Work Behavior, can foster organizational innovation. This expansion of Chinese expatriate literature contributes not only to Cultural Intelligence and Innovation research but also to the broader field of "China goes global" literature, by shedding light on the capabilities of Chinese expatriates rather than solely focusing on their interactions with other cultures.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As China continues to undergo rapid globalization and the internationalization of its organizations, there has been a significant rise in the number of Chinese expatriates working in multicultural environments. As a result, their interactions with individuals from diverse cultures have also increased. This study highlights the importance of enhancing Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as a means to promote more innovative work behavior through increased creativity, ultimately leading to organizational innovation.

In the current competitive market landscape, innovation has become crucial for organizations to maintain sustainability and relevance. International organizations actively seek for ways to foster innovation among their employees. The findings of this study demonstrate that by improving employees' Cultural Intelligence, their creativity and innovative work behavior can be significantly enhanced. This practical insight has meaningful implications for corporations, as they can invest in cultural intelligence training for their expatriates or select candidates with higher Cultural Intelligence for international assignments.

From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the existing body of knowledge on Cultural Intelligence, Creativity, and Innovative Work Behavior. The empirical evidence presented in this study contributes to the development of theories related to Cultural Intelligence and its impact on innovation, specifically within the context of the Chinese expatriate community.

However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of this paper. The study primarily focuses on Chinese expatriates without considering industry or firm-related variables, which may influence the relationship between cultural intelligence and innovative work behavior. As presented in the results, using two different tests yielded two contradicting results concerning the direct effect of cultural intelligence on innovative work behavior. Thus, different variables added or missed can greatly affect the results of a study. To advance the analysis further, future research could explore Chinese expatriates in specific industries or countries, considering factors like job level (managers vs. employees) and additional control variables, such as education level. Additionally, conducting similar studies with samples from different cultures and countries would enable insightful comparisons between expatriates of distinct origins and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Innovation.

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