



Cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural selling: The cognitive resource theory and social role theory perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the underlying mechanism explaining the contribution of cultural intelligence (CQ) to adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural selling contexts. The study draws on cognitive resource theory in order to explore the mediating role of customer qualification skills in explaining how CQ contributes to adaptive selling behaviors. The study also uses social role theory to illustrate the moderating role of gender in the effectiveness of cultural intelligence on customer qualification skills. Data were collected from 966 export salespeople in mainland China using a questionnaire survey, and partial least squares structural equation modeling was used for the data analysis. The results revealed a positive association between cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behaviors, as well as a partial mediating effect of customer qualification skills on this positive association. Moreover, the positive relationship between cultural intelligence and customer qualification skills was found to be stronger among female export salespeople than their male counterparts.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of globalization, cross-cultural selling has received increasing attention in the related literature. Cross-cultural selling refers to the interactions that a salesperson makes with a customer from a different culture in order to build a business relationship by successfully meeting the customer's needs (Delpechitre & Baker, 2017). According to this definition, export selling can be regarded as cross-cultural selling, since export salespeople and their customers usually come from different cultures (Charoensukmongkol & Pandey, 2021). The cultural differences between export salespeople and foreign customers may cause misunderstandings and even potential conflicts, which can present difficulties and challenges in export selling processes. Scholars have argued that salespeople engaging in cross-cultural selling should acquire some cross-cultural competency in order to manage problems caused by cultural differences so that they can achieve satisfactory sales performance (Awan et al., 2018; Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Cultural intelligence (CQ) has been proposed as a particularly critical cross-cultural competency for export salespeople experiencing complex encounters with customers from different cultures (Groves et al., 2015; Ott & Michailova, 2018). Therefore, developing an understanding of how CQ works in the context of cross-cultural selling

will provide insights for sales organizations and salespeople aiming to improve cross-cultural performance.

CQ is a set of abilities that helps people engaging in cross-cultural activities to improve cross-cultural performance (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Although it has gained dominance in recent cross-culture research (Alon et al., 2016; Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2022), there are significant research gaps about CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts. Previous studies of CQ have focused on international students, expatriates, cross-cultural teams, sojourners, and immigrants — representative samples involving cross-cultural living and working contexts (Adair et al., 2013; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). It was not until recent years that a small number of scholars began to explore CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts and, more specifically, in export selling contexts (Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Prior studies on CQ in export selling contexts found that CQ made an indirect contribution to export salespeople's sales performance and its effectiveness was contingent on the enhancement of export salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors, which in turn led to success in international sales performance (Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). The aforesaid research findings revealed the importance of adaptive selling behaviors in enhancing the contribution of CQ to international sales performance. Despite this, the means by which CQ can

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facilitate adaptive selling behaviors remain unknown. To fill this research gap, the present study aims to explore the underlying mechanism that accounts for how CQ may contribute to salespeople's improvement in adaptive selling behaviors in export selling contexts.

This study draws on cognitive resource theory (CRT) to explore the underlying mechanism explaining the contribution of CQ to salespeople's practice of adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural selling contexts. CRT holds that, while intelligence is important for people to perform a task effectively, some other cognitive resources are similarly necessary to optimize the performance outcome (Fiedler, 1986). Adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural selling are complex tasks which require processing high volumes of information from different cultures (Park & Deitz, 2006); therefore, we apply the theory to argue that cultural intelligence may be essential for export salespeople to perform adaptive selling behaviors effectively. Aside from this, other cognitive resources may also play an important role in improving the efficacy of CQ on adaptive selling behaviors. Customer qualification skills, a kind of cognitive ability based on categorization (Román & Iacobucci, 2010), may be one such cognitive factor. Román & Iacobucci (2010) define customer qualification skills as salespeople's capacity for qualifying and categorizing customers. They help to simplify complex stimuli and reduce cognitive burdens (Sharma & Levy, 1995). Given that customer qualification skills reflect salespeople's cognitive ability regarding the processing of information, they could be regarded as a necessary cognitive resource to enable the contribution of CQ to adaptive selling behaviors. Hence, this study draws on CRT to propose that customer qualification skills may play an important role in facilitating salespeople's leveraging of CQ to perform adaptive selling behaviors.

Another gap in CQ research in cross-cultural selling contexts is the lack of evidence regarding some moderating conditions that might strengthen or weaken the benefits of CQ. Although some prior research has shown that the effectiveness of CQ could be contingent on individuals' personal characteristics and job-related factors such as international experience (Lee & Sukoco, 2010), emotional intelligence (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018), and work experience (Jyoti & Kour, 2017; Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2019), scant research has examined the role of demographic characteristics using gender as a moderating variable. Gender is selected as the moderating variable because prior studies showed that males and females are different in the ways they process information and make judgements in selling contexts (McColl & Truong, 2013; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Accordingly, it is plausible for gender to influence the effect of CQ on salespeople's customer qualification skills. From a theoretical perspective, this study relies on social role theory to explain the moderating effects of gender.

The main objective of this study is to fill the gaps mentioned earlier. First, this study examines the mediating role of customer qualification skills in determining the impact of CQ on adaptive selling behaviors. To the best of our knowledge, no prior research has explored the relationship between CQ and customer qualification skills and the possible mediating effect of customer qualification skills on the relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. In addition, this study explores whether males or females tend to utilize CQ more effectively in demonstrating customer qualification skills. The results from this research will contribute to CQ research in the context of cross-cultural selling, an underexplored area in the literature. The study will not only broaden knowledge in CQ literature by clarifying the mechanism explaining how CQ helps individuals to be more effective in cross-cultural selling but will also clarify how gender might influence the effectiveness of CQ in this context.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Cognitive resource theory (CRT)

CRT is a theory that “provides a framework for explaining the processes by which abilities and job-related knowledge contribute to

leadership performance.” (Fiedler, 1986, p533). One of the key assumptions held by the theory is that leaders with more intelligence and competency make more effective plans, decisions, and action strategies (Blades & Fiedler, 1976; Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). The theory has been widely used in research about leadership effectiveness, and a large body of research has found that intellectual abilities (Simonenko, 2012; Vecchio & Robert, 1992), technical competence (Murphy et al., 1992), and job-relevant knowledge (experience) (Fiedler, 1986) are cognitive resources that determine leaders' effectiveness.

Given that CRT highlights the importance of possessing the valued traits of expertise, job-relevant knowledge, and intelligence for achieving optimal performance (Vecchio, 1990), the theory has also recently been applied in the personal selling field (Charoensukmongkol, 2020). For instance, Charoensukmongkol (2020) has used the theory as a theoretical support to propose CQ and trait mindfulness as important cognitive resources for export salespeople, since they enhance information-processing capability and consequently help salespeople demonstrate adaptive selling behaviors more effectively in cross-cultural selling. The research findings provided empirical evidence supporting the applicability of CRT in export selling contexts. However, it is worth noting that although Charoensukmongkol (2020) has pointed out the role of information-processing capability in transforming CQ into effective adaptive selling behaviors, the research lacks identification of relevant capability related to information processing. Given the role of customer qualification skills in enhancing information processing efficiency (Román & Rodríguez, 2015), this study filled the research gap left in Charoensukmongkol's (2020) research and relied on CRT to propose customer qualification skills as the necessary competency component of cognitive resource for export salespeople to optimize their performance in cross-cultural selling. Specifically, this study posited that export salespeople with more CQ and customer qualification skills will demonstrate better adaptive selling behaviors, due to their ability to develop more effective plans, decisions, and action strategies. This section reviews the main concepts of the study, after which the development of the hypotheses is presented.

2.2. Cultural intelligence

According to Earley and Ang (2003), CQ is an aggregate multidimensional construct consisting of four dimensions: cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ. Cognitive CQ refers to an individual's level of cultural knowledge, comprising such concepts as economic, legal, sociolinguistic, and interpersonal systems of different cultures and subcultures and knowledge of basic frameworks of cultural values (Ang et al., 2008). People equipped with a high level of cognitive CQ will better understand different societies' culture and better appreciate the systems that shape and cause specific patterns of social interaction within a culture; consequently, they will have better interactions with people from a culturally different society (Hansen et al., 2011). Metacognitive CQ refers to an individual's control of cognition and mental processing, including consciously becoming aware of cultural norms, monitoring thought processes and adjusting mental models for different cultures before, during and after cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2008). It involves people's deeper mental processing and active thinking about similarities and differences between cultures, and doubts about previous thinking and assumptions based on experiences with their own cultures (Caputo et al., 2019). People with a high level of meta-cognitive CQ will consciously think about their own cultural assumptions, and different societies' cultural preferences and norms; reflect on their own behavior in cross-cultural interactions; and adjust their cultural knowledge when interacting with people from different cultures, to achieve desired outcomes in cross-cultural interactions (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Motivational CQ reflects individuals' motivated cognition of acquiring and understanding cultural knowledge, during which attention and energy are channeled out of

intrinsic interest to facilitate goal achievement during cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2008). People with a high level of motivational CQ will be more psychologically prepared to learn and engage in cross-cultural interactions when confronted with conflicts in different cultural situations (Caputo et al., 2019). Finally, behavioral CQ refers to individuals' capability to exhibit situationally appropriate behaviors during cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2008). Individuals with a high level of behavioral CQ are more likely to adjust their verbal and nonverbal behaviors to meet the cultural expectations of people from different cultures.

Academia has identified CQ as an important ability in cross-cultural interaction settings and has confirmed its positive impact on international business success (Charoensukmongkol, 2021; Fu & Charoensukmongkol, 2021b; Ott & Michailova, 2018). However, despite the clear utility of CQ in explaining cross-cultural communication effectiveness (Bücker et al., 2014), few researchers have investigated the impact of CQ on salespeople's cross-cultural selling activities or performance (Chen et al., 2012; Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Chen et al. (2012) focused on cross-cultural selling in America. The authors investigated the impact of American realtors' motivational CQ on their sales performance when selling real estate to buyers from diverse cultural origins. Their research found that motivational CQ helps to increase American realtors' sales performance in cross-cultural selling. Despite its limitation in considering only one dimension of CQ, their research finding anticipates a positive role of salespeople's CQ in export selling. Additionally, Charoensukmongkol's (2020) research, which examined export salespeople, found that CQ did not contribute directly to sales performance at international trade shows. Instead, the effectiveness of CQ on international sales performance relied on export salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors. In addition, Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019) confirmed that CQ was conducive to export salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors at trade shows. To sum up, prior studies about CQ in the contexts of export selling found that CQ can contribute to international sales performance by improving export salespeople's behaviors first, particularly their adaptive selling behaviors.

2.3. Adaptive selling behaviors

Adaptive selling behaviors have been defined as "the altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation" (Weitz et al., 1986, p. 175). Salespeople who use "canned" or standardized sales presentations across sales encounters exhibit a low level of adaptive selling, whereas those who adjust to make different sales presentations during sales encounters demonstrate a high level of adaptive selling (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). According to Weitz et al.'s (1986) adaptive selling framework, the capabilities of a salesperson, which consist of abilities and skills, are key contingent factors deciding the motivation and practice of adaptive selling. The abilities dimension includes salespeople's knowledge about customers, products, sales environments, sales encounters, sales behaviors, etc., while the skills dimension includes information acquisition skills, such as accumulating information about sales encounters, asking questions about customers' preferences, listening, etc. (McFarland, 2019). To perform adaptive selling behaviors, salespeople must acquire these basic information acquisition skills and equip themselves with knowledge about sales situations. Literature has shown that various characteristics, such as knowledge, goal orientation, learning orientation, selling abilities, motives, introspection, and emotional intelligence, have been identified as antecedents of salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors (Agnihotri et al., 2017; Kaptein et al., 2018; Kimura et al., 2019; Limbu et al., 2016; McFarland, 2019).

Despite this, the definition of the concept indicates that a requisite for salespeople to perform adaptive selling behaviors is their perception of information about sales situations. Performing adaptive selling

behaviors effectively requires salespeople to form an accurate perception of customers and sales encounters to identify customers' needs and expectations. In export sales, such a basic requisite highlights the importance of salespeople's mastery of knowledge about foreign customers and markets. Moreover, as mentioned previously, adaptive selling behaviors can be used detrimentally as well as effectively. The effectiveness of adaptive selling behaviors depends on whether the output for performing adaptive selling behaviors outweighs the effort required to collect information about customers, and whether salespeople can use this information appropriately to perform adjustments (Yurova et al., 2017). Thus, the ability to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of information processing in adjusting selling behaviors is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of adaptive selling behaviors (Charoensukmongkol & Suthatorn, 2021). Such unique characteristics are often apparent in salespeople with customer qualification skills.

2.4. Customer qualification skills

Román and Iacobucci (2010) define customer qualification skills as a salesperson's proficiency in qualifying or categorizing prospects and customers. Specifically, it is a salesperson's ability to identify and categorize different types of customers, their associated products, and selling requirements. In nature, this skill is based on categorization, a cognitive ability which is fundamental to human beings (Sharma & Levy, 1995). In sales, the customer typology, based on categorization, can help salespeople to predict customer preferences or likely behaviors (Román & Iacobucci, 2010). The underlying assumption of this typology is that people with certain characteristics will behave in a manner that is consistent with that of other members of a similar category (Szymanski & Churchill Jr, 1990).

When salespeople interact with customers, whether their categorization about a customer is correct depends on the level of their customer qualification skills (Weitz et al., 1986). Furthermore, their categorization of customers is based on the cues gained in the process of interactions (Román & Iacobucci, 2010). Salespeople with a high level of customer qualification skills are likely to discern a more accurate typology of customers by properly categorizing sales encounters according to attributes indicating appropriate selling strategies. In contrast, salespeople whose customer qualification skills are inadequate are likely to classify customers inappropriately according to attributes that suggest superficial similarities between customers, such as their title, gender, style of dress, or professional position (Weitz et al., 1986). The accurate typology of customers helps salespeople to identify and analyze customers' needs, thereby enabling them to better understand customers' buying motives and predict customers' buying behaviors more accurately (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Sharma & Levy, 1995; Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Vaitoonkiat & Charoensukmongkol, 2020). Therefore, salespeople with a high level of customer qualification skills tend to be able to classify customers more accurately and have a better understanding of their requirements (Román & Iacobucci, 2010).

The factors that influence a salesperson's customer qualification skills include the firm's customer orientation, the salesperson's intrinsic motivation, and the salesperson's use of information technology (Charoensukmongkol & Suthatorn, 2018; Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015; Sasatanun & Charoensukmongkol, 2016). Regarding the outcome of the salesperson's customer qualification skills, previous studies have explored its role in improving customer-oriented selling, adaptive selling behavior, and salespeople's performance (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015). For instance, Román and Iacobucci (2010) drew on the categorization theory to propose that customer qualification skills can serve as an antecedent of adaptive selling behaviors. They argued that customer qualification skills promote adaptive selling behaviors because salespeople with high customer qualification skills develop a more accurate typology of customers and a better understanding of customers' needs,

which allows them to better predict customers' behaviors and propose appropriate solutions to meet their needs. The knowledge reservoir about using categorization of customers and sales encounters can be drawn on to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of information processing in interactions with customers. Therefore, customer qualification skills are necessary for salespeople to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their personal selling (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Román & Rodríguez, 2015).

2.5. Hypotheses development

2.5.1. Cultural intelligence and adaptive selling behaviors

This study postulates a positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviours. According to CRT, CQ serves as an essential intelligence for practicing adaptive selling behaviours in cross-cultural selling (Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Indeed, CQ comprises the knowledge dimension of the salesperson's characteristics to function as the antecedent of adaptive selling behaviours. An export salesperson with a high level of cognitive CQ is generally more knowledgeable about the economic, legal, business, and interpersonal framework of the importing country and has a better understanding of the importer's business environment, beliefs, practices, communication styles, etc. This enables them to leverage their cross-cultural knowledge structure to better adjust their presentation manners and content to communicate with foreign customers. Further, salespeople with a high level of meta-cognitive CQ tend to have a well-established repertoire of selling strategies closely linked to their cultural categories, as well as a better understanding about which adaptations are appropriate across cultures based on the differences between them (Hansen et al., 2011). Salespeople with a high level of motivational CQ tend to be more willing to dedicate more attention and energy to learning about the differences between cultures, and have stronger cross-cultural communication motives to cope with the barriers of negotiating across cultures (Chen et al., 2012). Finally, salespeople with a high level of behavioural CQ have greater ability and flexibility to adapt their verbal and nonverbal behaviours based on their understanding about the cultural backgrounds of the customers they serve (Hansen et al., 2011). In short, the four dimensions of CQ together equip export salespeople with more cross-cultural sales knowledge; greater awareness of cultural differences; stronger cross-cultural communication motives; and greater capability for adjusting verbal and non-verbal communications during sales processes, thus making the alteration of selling behaviors possible.

Hansen et al. (2011) argue that salespeople with a high level of CQ are likely to be more effective in cross-cultural selling as they can more readily adapt to foreign customers' cultural backgrounds. Past research findings showed that people engaging in international business with a high level of CQ tend to have more adaptive ability and make more adjustments to their behaviors and communication styles during their cross-cultural communications (Groves et al., 2015; Seriwatana & Charoensukmongkol, 2021; Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018). Recently, Charoensukmongkol's (2020) research, as well as that of Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019), confirmed that export salespeople's CQ positively affects their adaptive selling behaviors at international trade shows. Aligning with these research findings, this study argues that a higher level of CQ increases the likelihood that export salespeople will adjust their communication methods and selling behaviors during interactions with customers from another country. Thus, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive association between export salespeople's CQ and their adaptive selling behaviors.

2.5.2. Mediating effect of customer qualification skills

This study proposes that customer qualification skills mediate the positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. Firstly, this study posits that there is a positive association between customer qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors. Hansen et al. (2011)

argue that a salesperson's knowledge structure determines the quality of his or her adaptive selling behaviors, as adaptation requires elaborate knowledge structures of selling situations. The definition of adaptive selling behaviors also suggests that a salesperson's perception about selling situations is a requisite for altering presentations in sales encounters. Salespeople with high customer qualification skills meet this requirement, as they have a rich and well-developed base of category knowledge about customer types. These salespeople can leverage the well-classified customer types to better organize, interpret, and evaluate sales situations; select personalized sales strategies for well-defined customer types; and make corresponding adjustments to meet the needs of different types of customers during sales presentations (Leong et al., 1989). According to Sharma and Levy (1995), salespeople with a well-developed category structure practice adaptive selling behavior to a higher degree than those whose category structure is less well developed. Román and Iacobucci's (2010) empirical research also confirmed that salespeople's customer qualification skills bear a positive association with their adaptive selling behaviors. Therefore, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 2: Export salespeople's customer qualification skills are positively associated with their adaptive selling behaviors.

Secondly, this study argues that CQ and customer qualification skills are positively associated. Hansen et al. (2011) state that because salespeople with a high level of CQ have richer and more clearly defined hierarchical structures of cultural categories, they have more advanced cognitive categorization capabilities with which to identify similarities and differences across countries. Following this logic, this study holds that salespeople with a high level of CQ tend to have high customer qualification skills due to their richer and more clearly defined hierarchical knowledge structures, encompassing foreign customers' needs, expectations, beliefs, norms, habits, and preferences. Moreover, since salespeople with a high level of CQ tend to be more aware of similarities and differences between cultures, they are likely to classify foreign customers more accurately based on their understanding of these similarities and differences (Brislin et al., 2006). In addition, since individuals with higher CQ are more interested in learning and understanding the differences between countries, they may be more adept at identifying foreign customers' needs and expectations (Chen et al., 2012); this in turn helps them to qualify and classify customers more effectively. Based on these arguments, this study proposes that:

Hypothesis 3: An export salesperson's CQ is positively associated with their customer qualification skills.

Thirdly, this study uses CRT to support the proposition that customer qualification skills mediate the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. Firstly, CRT holds that, aside from intelligence, other cognitive resources are necessary to optimize the performance of a task (Fiedler, 1986). This study proposes that customer qualification skills are such cognitive resources that can contribute to improvement in the practices of adaptive selling behaviors. Following CRT, this study argues that although CQ is conducive to the practice of adaptive selling behaviors, since it meets the basic requirement that salespeople should master knowledge about sales situations, a salesperson's ability to identify and qualify customers is crucial to improving the accuracy and efficiency of leveraging CQ to implement adaptive selling behaviors. In addition, CRT holds that leaders with more intelligence and competencies tend to make more effective plans, decisions, and action strategies than their lower-skilled counterparts (Fiedler, 1986). We draw on CRT to argue that salespeople with higher customer qualification skills are expected to utilize their refined knowledge structure about categorized customers to make better predictions about customer behaviors; put forward more effective plans and selling strategies; and formulate more effective solutions to meet customers' needs. Furthermore, as a basic human function, customer qualification skills in nature improve the effectiveness and efficiency of information processing and reduce salespeople's cognitive burden (Román & Iacobucci, 2010), which could be crucial in optimizing the efficacy of leveraging

CQ to make adaptive selling behaviors. Thus, considering the gist of CRT, the role of customer qualification skills in improving information processing efficiency and reducing cognitive burden, and prior research findings about the positive associations of adaptive selling behaviors with CQ (Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019) and customer qualification skills (Román & Iacobucci, 2010; Zhou & Charoensukmongkol, 2021), this study posits that:

Hypothesis 4: Customer qualification skills mediate the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors.

2.5.3. Moderating effect of gender

Gender difference has been widely explored in sales fields in such areas as salespeople's job satisfaction (Rutherford et al., 2014), networking behaviors (Macintosh & Krush, 2014, 2017), adaptive selling behaviors and customer orientation (Franke & Park, 2006). Research findings are mixed. For example, while Macintosh and Krush (2014, 2017) discovered that gender did influence salespeople's networking behaviors, Franke and Park (2006) argued that it played no role in salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors. Regarding the impact of gender on customer qualification skills, little research has addressed the issue and exploration is warranted.

This study relies on social role theory to explore the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between CQ and customer qualification skills and proposes that this effect is likely to be stronger for female salespeople than their male counterparts. Social role theory holds that men and women's social behaviors show differences and similarities in the process of socialization and the formation of gender roles (Eagly, 1987). As they are socialized differently from early childhood, men and women are expected to exhibit different attitudes and behaviors toward their sex-typical productive work (Eagly, 1997). For example, research has found that women are better adapted to socially oriented communications, and are more likely to use these communications to create and maintain connections and intimacy in these relationships (Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, 2022; Fu & Charoensukmongkol, 2021a; Johnson, 2011; Tannen, 1992). In the fields of sales and marketing, literature has documented the moderating role of gender in selling contexts regarding the different ways that men and women process information (McColl & Truong, 2013; Mcquiston & Morris, 2009; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Numerous studies have found that women tend to be more effective in decoding non-verbal expressions and more sensitive to the particular relevant information when making judgments (McColl & Truong, 2013; Meyerslevy & Sternthal, 1991; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Moreover, prior studies have confirmed that women's strengths in communication have enabled them to integrate more easily into foreign cultures (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Sinangil & Ones, 2003). Considering women's strengths in communication, female export salespeople are expected to be more effective in leveraging their CQ to detect clues arising from interactions and forming judgments about qualifications of foreign customers. The theoretical support and prior research findings inform the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: The positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills is likely to be stronger among female export salespeople than male ones.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and data collection procedure

The sample for this study included 24,191 Chinese export salespeople registered on the FOB Business Forum website. The website has 2,631,535 registered members and claims to be the largest professional web portal for Chinese export and import practitioners to share information and knowledge about international trade. Data were collected by sending an email to each export salesperson in the database. The email contained a cover letter and a link to the questionnaire on Wenjuanxing, a Chinese professional survey website popular for helping researchers

and marketers create surveys. The cover letter expressed the academic purpose of the study and assured participants that their anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. In return for their participation, the researchers provided each selected participant with 8.88 RMB. The response time was about one month and a follow-up reminder email was sent in the middle of the month. To assess non-response bias, we adopted Armstrong and Overton (1977)'s approach to compare the early and late responses with respect to main variables (CQ, customer qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors) and demographics (export selling experience). The results revealed no significant differences between them.

Of 992 responses, 966 responses were complete and usable for data analysis, which constitutes a 99.3% completion rate. The respondents come from 26 provinces and municipalities in China and deal products in various industries such as textiles, food, toys, electronics, machinery, chemicals, etc. They export to 52 countries in total, and most export to more than one country. Descriptive statistics of the respondents are reported in Table 1.

3.2. Measures

All the measures used in this study came from prior studies. Translation and back-translation techniques were followed to ensure the quality of Chinese instruments (Hult et al., 2008). A pilot test was conducted among a group of export salespeople and adjustments were made to the scaling and wording of statements according to their suggestions.

CQ was measured by adopting a set of self-reported CQ scales developed by Ang et al. (2007). The scales contained 20 items: six to measure cognitive CQ, four to measure meta-cognitive CQ, five to measure motivational CQ, and five to measure behavioral CQ. All items were measured using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Adaptive selling behaviors were measured on a five-item ADAPTS-SV scale (Robinson Jr et al., 2002). Respondents were asked to rate themselves on the five-point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Salesperson's customer qualification skills were measured by a three-item scale developed by Román and Iacobucci (2010). Respondents were asked to evaluate their ability to qualify customers and prospects on five-point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (needs improvement) to 5 (outstanding). A low score represented a low level of customer qualification skills, and a high score represented a high level of customer qualification skills.

The moderating variable of gender was coded as a dummy variable (male = 1; female = 0).

3.3. Control variables

This study controlled for age, education level, and export selling experience, as these variables may affect adaptive selling behaviors (Ogilvie et al., 2018). Age was measured in years. Education level was measured as an ordinal variable ("below diploma" = 1; "diploma" = 2; "bachelor's degree" = 3; "master's degree or above" = 4). Export selling experience was measured as an ordinal variable at four levels ("less than one year" = 1; "1–5 years" = 2; "6–10 years" = 3; "more than 10 years" = 4).

3.4. Data analysis

This study used the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to analyze data and estimate the proposed model. PLS-SEM is a representative of the variance-based least squares estimation technique (Chin, 2001). Its primary objective is to make a causal-predictive analysis of data that are high in complexity but low in theoretical support (Henseler et al., 2009). PLS is suitable for

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of the respondents (n = 966).

Characteristics	Descriptive statistics		
	Male (n = 459)	Female (n = 507)	Total (n = 966)
Age			
Min	19	17	17
Max	58	57	58
Mean	33.74	32.32	32.99
Standard deviation	6.442	5.791	6.146
Education level			
Below diploma	36	40	76
Diploma	85	136	221
Bachelor's degree	286	285	571
Master's degree and above	52	46	98
Export selling experience			
Less than one year	33	42	75
1–5 years	233	273	506
6–10 years	135	134	269
More than 10 years	58	58	116
Job title			
Sales representative	232	298	530
Sales manager	181	170	351
General sales manager	46	39	85
Industries			
Fast consumer goods (like beverage & cosmetics)	50	63	113
Textile, clothing & accessories	38	72	110
Furniture & furnishing, art craft, toys, office products	84	65	149
Communication, Electronics & computer accessories	117	107	224
Auto parts & accessories	52	33	85
Machinery, equipment &Industrial automation	24	22	46
Medicine, bioengineering &medical equipment	17	17	34
Publication & packing box	8	8	16
Transportation & logistics	13	4	17
Energy & chemicals	5	7	12
Others	51	109	160
Countries salespeople export to	n/a	n/a	
U.S.A			451
Japan			273
U.K.			195
South Korea			189
Germany			107
Canada			92
France			91
Russia			72
India			69
Thailand			64
Singapore			57
Malaysia			43
Vietnam			38
Italy			34
Holland			31
Brazil			28
Europe			20
New Zealand			17
Indonesia			15
Spain			15
Turkey			13
Philippine			11
Pakistan			10
Cambodia			9
Nepal			9
Finland			8
Mexico			8
Mexico			8
Austria			7
Dubai			7
Myanmar			7
Belgium			6
Nigeria			6
Tanzania			6
Bangladesh			5
Hongkong			5
Sweden			5
Switzerland			5
Ukraine			5
Iran			4

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Characteristics	Descriptive statistics		
	Male (n = 459)	Female (n = 507)	Total (n = 966)
Denmark			3
Greek			3
Hungary			3
UAE			3
Oman			2
Portugal			2
Zambia			2
Afghanistan			1
Australia			1
Brunei			1
Libya			1

analyzing data that do not have normal distribution and for complex models with a high number of indicators and constructs (Chin, 2010). PLS was used for data analysis, as the concept of CQ has 20 indicators and all the variables were not normally distributed. The software Warp-PLS (Version 6.0) was used to conduct PLS regression analysis.

4. Results

Before estimating the structural model, reliability and validity tests were conducted for all the reflective latent variables. Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings. Factor loadings above 0.5 support satisfactory convergent validity (Hair, 2009); As shown in Table 2, results of factor loadings for all of the latent constructs were greater than 0.5, suggesting satisfactory convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) with its corresponding correlations with other constructs. To achieve satisfactory discriminant validity, the square root of AVE for each construct must exceed its correlation with any other construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results shown in Table 3 confirmed that all the square roots of AVEs met this requirement, suggesting satisfactory discriminant validity. Third, construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficient. Both coefficients should be higher than 0.7

Table 2
Factor loadings of all latent variables.

Cultural intelligence (CQ)	Customer qualification skills (QUAL)	Adaptive selling behaviors (ASB)
MCCQ1:0.734	QUAL1:0.898	ASB1:0.804
MCCQ2:0.668	QUAL2:0.873	ASB2:0.681
MCCQ3:0.712	QUAL3:0.896	ASB3:0.785
MCCQ4:0.720		ASB4:0.792
CCQ1:0.720		ASB5:0.771
CCQ2:0.758		
CCQ3:0.753		
CCQ4:0.754		
CCQ5:0.772		
CCQ6:0.753		
MCQ1:0.668		
MCQ2:0.726		
MCQ3:0.751		
MCQ4:0.688		
MCQ5:0.725		
BCQ1:0.749		
BCQ2:0.737		
BCQ3:0.713		
BCQ4:0.736		
BCQ5:0.731		

Note: CQ = cultural intelligence, MCCQ = metacognitive CQ, CCQ = cognitive CQ, MCQ = motivational CQ, BCQ = behavioral CQ, QUAL = customer qualification skills, ASB = adaptive selling behaviors.

(Nunnally, 1978). The results presented in Table 3 indicated that Cronbach’s alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficients of all reflective constructs met the requirement.

Multicollinearity was evaluated using full variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics. A full VIF lower than 3.3 confirms that multicollinearity is not a serious issue (Kock, 2017). Results of the multicollinearity test are reported in Table 4. The highest VIF of the latent variable was 2.876, thus confirming that multicollinearity was not a concern in this study. Finally, the common method bias (CMB) was assessed using Harman’s single-factor test, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). All indicators were analyzed by extracting a single factor in the principal component analysis. The result indicated that the one-factor solution explained only 43.27% of the variance, which was lower than the 50% threshold. In addition, the one-factor confirmatory factor analysis model did not fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 1806.1$; d.f. = 546; $p < .001$). Apart from Harman’s single-factor test, this study employed the marker variable technique suggested by Lindell and Whitney (2001). We used the measure of social media training as the marker variable. It had three items: “I receive the training I need to be able to use social media effectively”, “My company has provided me complete instructions and practice in using social media”, and “My company has extensively trained me in the use of social media.” The questions were measured on the five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measure showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.865$). Essentially, this variable has no theoretical linkage to the focal variables (customer qualification skills, adaptive selling behaviors, and CQ) in the model. The correlation analysis also indicated that the correlations ranged from -0.05 to 0.044, and none were statistically significant. The overall results ease the potential issue of CMB in our data.

The results of the PLS analysis are summarized in Fig. 1.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. The results from the PLS analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between these factors ($\beta = 0.417$; $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive association between customer qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors. The results confirmed their positive association, which was statistically supported ($\beta = 0.449$; $p < .001$). Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills. The results confirmed a positive and strong association between them, which was statistically supported ($\beta = 0.665$; $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4 proposed that customer qualification skills mediated the positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. The mediating effect was assessed by performing a Sobel test. The results confirmed a positive mediation, which was statistically significant ($t = 9.45$; $p = .000$). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Moreover, when examining the direct relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors, the result revealed a statistically supported positive association between them ($\beta = 0.417$; $p < .001$). Thus, it can be concluded that

Table 3
Correlation among variables and square root of average variance extracted.

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha coefficient	Composite Reliability coefficient	CQ	QUAL	ASB	AGE	GEN	EDU	ESE
CQ	0.953	0.958	(0.729)						
QUAL	0.868	0.919	0.665**	(0.889)					
ASB	0.825	0.878	0.724**	0.738**	(0.768)				
AGE	N/A	N/A	0.043	0.054	0.032	(1)			
GEN	N/A	N/A	0.068*	0.100**	0.023	0.07*	(1)		
EDU	N/A	N/A	0.175**	0.168**	0.174**	-0.044	0.07*	(1)	
ESE	N/A	N/A	0.066*	0.164**	0.150**	0.154**	0.040	0.076*	(1)

Notes: * p < 0.05, **p < 0.01;

Square roots of average variance extracted of latent variables are shown in the parentheses.

CQ = cultural intelligence, QUAL = customer qualification skills, ASB = adaptive selling behaviors, AGE = age.

GEN = gender dummy variable (male = 1, female = 0), EDU = education, ESE = export selling experience.

Table 4
Full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics.

Variables	CQ	QUAL	ASB	AGE	GEN	EDU	ESE
Full VIF	2.317	2.466	2.876	1.035	1.027	1.050	1.067

Note: CQ = cultural intelligence, QUAL = customer qualification skills, ASB = adaptive selling behaviors, GEN = gender, EDU = education, AGE = age, ESE = export selling experience.

the positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors was partially mediated by customer qualification skills.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that gender moderated the positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills. The result showed that the beta coefficient of the interaction between CQ and gender was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.043$; $p = .034$). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported. The regression lines that represented the association between CQ and customer qualification skills moderated by gender were created by using the standardized scores of the variables. The graph shown in Fig. 2 demonstrated that the positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills was more positive for female salespeople than for males. Without CQ, female salespeople tended to exhibit a lower level of customer qualification skills than their male counterparts. Although the increase in CQ score was associated with the increase in customer qualification skills in both male and female salespeople, the rate of change was higher in female salespeople than in male ones. With a high CQ score, female salespeople's customer qualification skills tended to become equal to (and slightly higher than) the customer qualification skills of male salespeople. Thus, it can be concluded that the positive effect of CQ on customer qualification skills is stronger among female salespeople than male salespeople.

The effect of the control variables was as follows. The export selling

experience was found to have a statistically significant positive association with adaptive selling behaviors ($\beta = 0.049$; $p = .003$). Adaptive selling behavior was found to have a statistically insignificant association with age ($\beta = -0.016$, $p = .226$) and education level ($\beta = .033$; $p = .060$).

The r-squares from the analysis were reported as follows. The r-square associated with customer qualification skill indicated that CQ could explain salespeople's customer qualification skills by 44.4%. The r-squares associated with adaptive selling behavior indicated that CQ, customer qualification skills, and export selling experience altogether could explain salesperson's adaptive selling behavior by 64.9%.

5. Discussion

5.1. General discussion

This study was the first to examine the contribution of CQ to adaptive selling behaviors in export selling contexts by considering the mediating role of customer qualification skills through the lens of cognitive resource theory. This study also examined whether the association between CQ and customer qualification skills tended to differ between female and male salespeople. The results from the PLS analysis supported all the hypotheses.

Firstly, the results provided empirical evidence supporting the positive association between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors, which means that export salespeople with high CQ tended to engage in a higher level of adaptive behaviors. This finding is consistent with Pandey and Charoensukmongkol (2019) and Charoensukmongkol's (2020) latest research findings that export salespeople with high CQ demonstrated a high level of adaptive selling behaviors at international trade shows. Secondly, the results showed that customer qualification skills were positively associated with adaptive selling behaviors. This finding

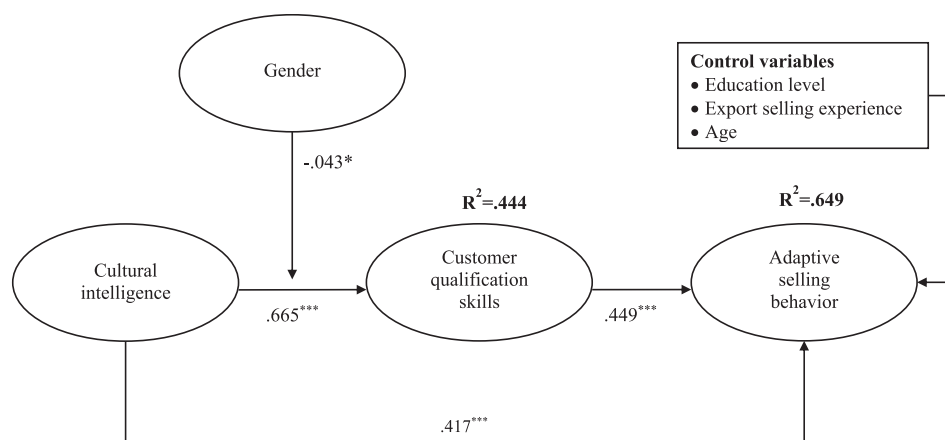


Fig. 1. Results from PLS-SEM analysis.

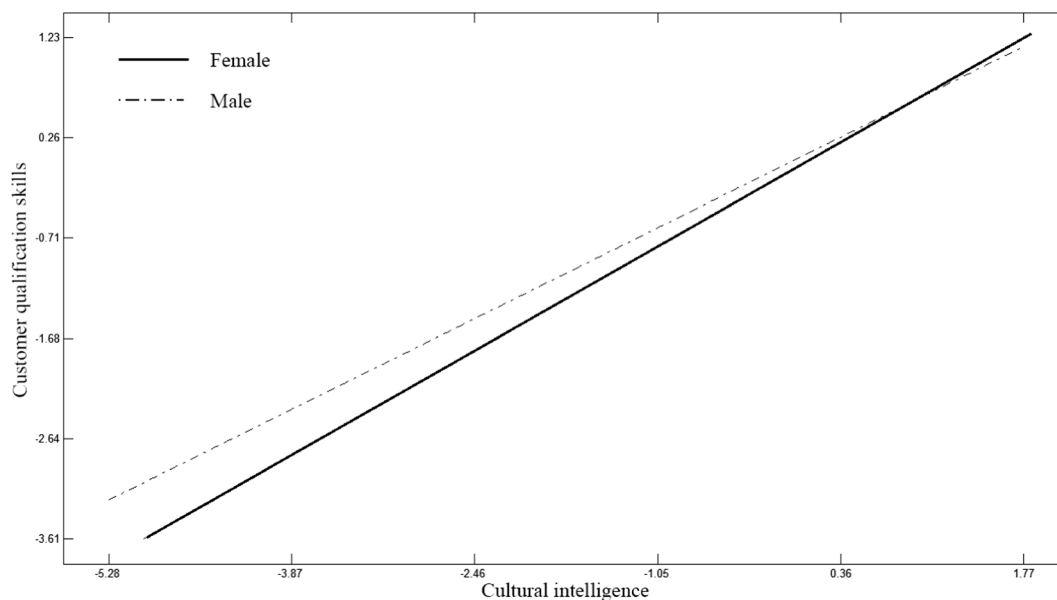


Fig. 2. Moderating effect of gender.

indicated that export salespeople with a high level of customer qualification skills tended to perform more adaptive selling behaviors. This is consistent with previous studies which found that salespeople with a well-developed category structure practice adaptive selling behaviors to a higher degree than those with a poorly developed one (Sharma & Levy, 1995; Sharma et al., 2000). In particular, the research finding is congruent with Román and Iacobucci's (2010) research, in which salespeople's customer qualification skills were found to contribute to improvement in the extent to which salespeople practice adaptive selling behaviors. Thirdly, the results revealed a positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills. This finding confirmed the important role of CQ in equipping export salespeople with sufficient cultural knowledge about foreign customers to qualify customers in export selling contexts. Although no prior research has explored the relationship between them, this finding aligns with prior CQ studies, which found that CQ can function effectively in many cross-cultural settings (Ott & Michailova, 2018; Varela, 2019).

Moreover, the result from the mediating analysis found a partial mediating effect of customer qualification skills on the positive relationship between CQ and adaptive selling behaviors. This finding suggested that, while CQ alone was effective in helping export salespeople to practice adaptive selling behaviors, higher effectiveness can be achieved by developing salespeople's other competencies, i.e., customer qualification skills. This is an important finding because it highlights customer qualification skills as essential competencies in translating CQ into adaptive selling behaviors for export salespeople. This finding revealed the underlying mechanism explaining why export salespeople with high CQ tended to engage more effectively in adaptive selling behaviors more effectively.

Finally, this study found that the positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills was stronger for female export salespeople than for males. In other words, female salespeople tend to better utilize their cultural intelligence to qualify customers and identify customer needs more effectively than their male counterparts. The finding regarding the moderating effect of gender was congruent with prior CQ studies in which the effectiveness of CQ was found to be contingent on the characteristics of individuals (Jyoti & Kour, 2017; Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Meanwhile, this also aligns with prior studies examining the moderating role of gender in selling contexts with respect to the effectiveness of communication (McColl & Truong, 2013;

Mcquiston & Morris, 2009; Palmer & Bejou, 1995). In particular, it is congruent with prior research findings about females' strength in information processing and utilizing information making decisions. It supports the argument of Palmer and Bejou (1995, p.20) which indicates that females tend to be more sensitive to stimuli than males and tend to "exhibit greater sensitivity to the particulars of relevant information than males when making judgements". This strength explains why female export salespeople in our study can better process information and make more appropriate judgements to qualify and categorize customers than males.

5.2. Research contributions

This study contributed to CQ research in the field of cross-cultural selling in three important ways. Firstly, the research finding of the positive association of CQ with customer qualification skills filled a void in CQ research, adding to the cross-cultural sales literature. Secondly, the finding regarding the mediating role of customer qualification skills in enabling the contribution of CQ to adaptive selling behaviors revealed the working mechanism of CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts, thereby advancing prior understanding about CQ. Previous studies are helpful in confirming that CQ is conducive to an increase in sales performance through the improvement of adaptive selling behaviors (Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019); however, to the best of our knowledge, no prior research has explored the underlying mechanism of why CQ contributes to adaptive selling behaviors. This study is among the first studies to perform in-depth investigation into how CQ helps to improve salespeople's competencies and behaviors in cross-cultural selling contexts. Thirdly, the finding regarding the moderating effect of gender on the positive association between CQ and customer qualification skills added to CQ literature in which the effectiveness of CQ was found to be contingent on the characteristics of individuals (Charoensukmongkol & Pandey, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). The finding that the positive relationship between CQ and customer qualification skills is stronger for female export salespeople than males provides additional evidence about the conditioning factors that may impact the effectiveness of CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts. This study is one of the few studies that have examined the moderating role of demographic characteristics, specifically gender, in influencing the efficacy of CQ. The finding expanded the current knowledge about the factors determining the effectiveness of CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts, thus making a

worthy addition to CQ literature.

From the theoretical perspective, the research finding of the mediating role of customer qualification skills also provided extra evidence supporting CRT. This finding confirmed the role of customer qualification skills as a cognitive resource facilitating the leveraging of CQ to practice adaptive selling behaviors in cross-cultural selling contexts. Specifically, this study advances Charoensukmongkol's (2020) research by identifying customer qualification skills as the competency component of salespeople's cognitive resource, adding to its intelligence component and enriching salespeople's cognitive resource package.

Finally, the research finding regarding the moderating role of gender provided additional evidence in the context of export selling as well as the social role theory. This study confirmed that female and male export salespeople diverge in their effectiveness of leveraging CQ to exhibit customer qualification skills. The finding implied that the social role theory has its own explanatory power in export sales occupation.

5.3. Managerial implications

The results of the present research yield some insights for sales organizations aiming to improve salespeople's performance in their cross-cultural selling tasks. First, given that the present research revealed the positive impacts of CQ on customer qualification skills as well as on adaptive selling behaviors, it is suggested that sales organizations and managers should view CQ as an important intelligence for salespeople to achieve success in export selling. Because export salespeople with a high level of CQ have more understanding about foreign business norms and have more sensitivity to expectations of foreign customers, they can exhibit appropriate selling behaviors and propose suitable solutions to meet the needs of customers from different cultures. Their deep understanding about foreign cultures enables them to demonstrate customer qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors, which help them to improve sales performance. On the other hand, salespeople without CQ may be more sensitive to the cultural difference of foreign customers, which could possibly make foreign customers to be dissatisfied with the salespeople during the sales interaction. Hence, sales managers and organizations hoping to achieve satisfactory success in global sales must have qualified export salespeople with high CQ. Human resources managers can use the standardized measure of CQ as a tool to assess interviewees' CQ level when recruiting new export salespeople and hire those whose CQ level is high. Moreover, as prior studies have found that CQ is malleable and can be developed through active measures (Ang et al., 2007; Rehg, Gundlach, & Grigorian, 2012), a CQ training could be considered as the alternative choice to help export salespeople to improve CQ level.

Second, given that this study found customer qualification skills to be important competencies which help translate export salespeople's CQ into adaptive selling behaviors, it is suggested that management should consider helping salespeople to improve their customer qualification skills. In particular, export salespeople with improved customer qualification skills are able to possess refined hierarchical knowledge about foreign customer types. Based on this categorized knowledge across cultures, they can better predict foreign customers' buying intentions and behaviors, thereby increasing the chances of closing deals with the customers. In contrast, export salespeople without customer qualification skills may waste a considerable amount of time working with unqualified customers, which could potentially decrease their work efficiency. Given this, sales managers and organizations are advised to provide training on how to qualify and categorize customers in combination with CQ training. It has been widely recognized that customer qualification skills can be learned by observing experienced sales managers, as well as through training (Sharma & Levy, 1995). For example, sales organizations could invite expert salespeople to instruct on (1) what traits of foreign customers can be used for qualification; (2) how to apply a cross-cultural knowledge framework to extract information to classify customers and identify their needs; (3) what selling strategies

could be used for certain types of foreign customers etc. Such a combined intervention can help cross-cultural salespeople to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of leveraging CQ to identify qualified customers from different cultures, leading to more effective adaptive selling behaviors. Besides, export salespeople with improved customer qualification skills should be encouraged to share information about customer preferences from different cultural perspectives, which will help increase the repertoire of companies' qualified customers in the long run. This measure could also help companies to adopt certain marketing strategy to target potential customers in different countries more accurately, thereby increasing the efficiency of turning prospects into leads.

Third, although the research finds females tend to be more efficient in translating CQ into customer qualification skills, we do not recommend different managerial guidelines by gender. Instead, given the efficacy of CQ on customer qualification skills among both females and males, we recommend team selling as a possible choice for an optimal effect through joint efforts by both genders. With team selling, male salespeople can learn from their female counterparts by closely observing female salespeople's selling behaviors. On the other hand, female salespeople can also share their viewpoints about foreign customers with male salespeople, thereby making the quality of customers qualification to be more accurate and efficient. In this way, female salespeople's strength is utilized to its optimal effect.

Overall, sales organizations and managers hoping for successful cross-cultural selling need to develop their salespeople's cross-cultural competencies, including CQ, and improve their sales skills and behaviors such as customer qualification skills and adaptive selling behaviors.

5.4. Limitations

Although this study makes several valuable contributions, some limitations should also be addressed. Firstly, because this study used self-evaluation scales to measure all the main constructs, it may suffer from subjective bias. Secondly, as the data used for relationship analysis were cross-sectional, the relationships between variables could be interpreted in terms of association rather than causation. Thirdly, as this study used monetary incentives to increase the response rate, it may be subject to participation bias. The use of monetary incentives can also cause acquiescence bias, which may occur when participants have a friendly attitude to the survey (Saunders et al., 2009). This is a possibility in the current study, as participants may become friendly in return for the monetary compensation. Finally, as the sample was entirely Chinese, the results of the study have limited generalizability to export salespeople in other countries. What differentiates Chinese culture from that of other countries and regions may create problems when attempting to generalize the results. For instance, due to China's collectivism-oriented culture, Chinese export salespeople may regard it necessary to change their presentation to appeal to the overarching standards of customers as a group; conversely, salespeople from an individualism-oriented culture may show more respect to individual tastes (Park & Deitz, 2006). Indeed, research has shown that salespeople across cultures exhibit different levels of adaptiveness (Pandey & Charoensukmongkol, 2019). Given the influence of national culture on marketing, the literature has noted that similar sales practices across cultures may not result in similar outcomes (Deshpandé et al., 2000; Murphy, 1999). Moreover, social role theorists claimed that gender difference was expected to be smaller or even diminish in cultures with increasing gender equity (Schmitt et al., 2017). Whether the moderating role of gender still exists in cultures with more gender equity needs further investigation. Hence, it would have been preferable to conduct further research in more countries, to increase the generalization of research findings in this study.

5.5. Recommendations for future research

The present research findings suggest recommendations for future research to better understand the role of CQ in cross-cultural selling. Extant research has confirmed the effectiveness of CQ in diverse cross-cultural settings, while a small number of studies have identified the contribution of CQ to improving salespeople's adaptive selling behaviors and sales performance. Therefore, future studies may consider its association with other key selling skills, such as listening and questioning skills, which may explain the effectiveness of CQ in cross-cultural selling contexts. In addition, given this study has identified gender as a moderating factor which influences the efficacy of CQ on customer qualification skills, future studies are recommended to explore other conditioning factors, such as export salespeople's perception of cultural difference, which may strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of CQ on customer qualification skills in cross-cultural selling contexts.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Jihong Zhou: Writing – original draft. **Peerayuth Charoensukmongkol:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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