

HOSPITALITY ASIAN-NESS AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF HONG KONG HOTELS

Jason W. M. Kelly

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

Aojia Zhang

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

Xiaolu Hu

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

Stephanie Man Fung Lee

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR, China

INTRODUCTION

The history of Hong Kong and the development of its modern tourism industry has been influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures. These Eastern or Asian influences have been clearly described as differentiating factors from Western hotels, particularly in luxury hotel brands (Fakfare et al., 2019). In corporate culture, Chen and Chon (2016) found that a more traditional Asian sociocultural lens was applied in Asian hospitality in contrast to the Western paradigm of standardised operating procedures. This has been intrinsically tied to concepts of Confucianism and its effect on the social fabric of Asian societies (Chon & Hao, 2020), which unavoidably affects the corporate culture of Asian businesses. According to Chin et al. (2016), the concepts of Asian-ness in service include the delivery of hospitality sincerely, demonstrating attention to detail and a more emotive interaction service delivery. The idea of Asian-ness is also extended to design, where the practice of *Feng Shui* (風水) can often be seen in elements of how the building and rooms are designed and put together, demonstrating a deep connection to these Chinese philosophies (Piuchan & Pang, 2015).

The Asian hospitality paradigm is inseparable from its embodiment of Asian-ness in development, operation, and customer service. In hospitality, the concept of ‘Asian-ness’ describes “the unique features that are special to Asia and driven by sociocultural and historical reasons” (Chon, 2019, p. 7). The manifestation of Asian-ness in the hospitality industry is affected by the social

economy, history and culture, philosophy, and religion in Asia (Chon et al., 2020). For example, the widespread popularity of Confucian philosophy in Asia has shaped the Asian hospitality paradigm (Chon & Hao, 2020). Similarly, Buddhism's influence has significantly impacted the service style in Southeast Asia (Fakfare et al., 2019). This Asian paradigm of hospitality differs significantly from Western hotels' standardised and stylised operations models, as Asian hotels apply social and humanistic concepts to hospitality management and practices (Wan & Chon, 2010).

Corporate cultures in the Asian hospitality industry highlight relationships referred to in Chinese as *Guan Xi* (關係). This includes building harmonious and sustainable relationships between businesses and customers, leaders and employees, and businesses and society are often extra-sensory interactions of emotional significance (Gilbert & Tsao, 2008; Chon & Hao, 2020). Furthermore, service staff reflect Asian-ness in their practices involving gentleness, sincerity, giving, kindness, forgiveness, balance, keen attention to small details, the initiative in offering services, etc. (Chin et al., 2016; Chon, 2019). The design and decoration of many Asian hotels employ the principles of *Feng Shui* (風水) (Piuchan & Pang, 2015). Through its practice, it is believed to bring wealth, peace, and good luck to the hotel and its guests through the design, layout, and décor. Some well-known international hotel chains have started to embrace Asian-ness and incorporate Asian hospitality into their management and operational practices to pursue long-term development in Asia and

worldwide (Chen & Chon, 2016).

The factors influencing customer satisfaction within hospitality include brand culture, physical setting, environment, and intangible service characteristics (Tan et al., 2014). The Asian paradigm in luxury hospitality demonstrates a distinct corporate culture, service style, and design (décor) which are very different from those of international luxury hotel groups. Many leading Asian hotel brands emphasise the unique 'family concept,' in which creating a home atmosphere, the concept of kindness and giving, and service with sincerity and humility are distinguished from the Western hospitality industry (Heffernan & Droulers, 2008). Furthermore, Chon and Hao (2020) highlighted the influence of Confucianism on Asia hotels, and they interpreted CSR (corporate social responsibility), business and work ethics, service provision, and leadership from the perspective of "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and trust.

Despite the existing literature on Asian hospitality and Asian-ness in hospitality, there is a lack of comprehensive research that explores its influence on customer satisfaction. To address this gap, this exploratory study presents a conceptual three-dimensional business model outlining aspects of Asian-ness contributing to customer satisfaction within the hospitality context. In addition, the researchers looked at how the Asian-ness of hotels' corporate culture, services provided, and design elements collectively impact customer satisfaction. This study will contribute to the existing literature on customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry and offer valuable insights to hoteliers on aspects of Asian-ness in hospitality design that can attract and satisfy customers.

METHOD

Through the use of a multiple-case study approach (Yin, 1994), the study employs on-site observation, in-depth unstructured interviews, and online comments review (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) to collect qualitative data, which was then analysed using thematic (Guest et al., 2012) and cross-case study techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis also involved the integration of existing frameworks, including the service strategy model

(Albrecht & Zemke, 1985) and the Confucian hospitality business model (Chon & Hao, 2020).

To obtain rich and detailed qualitative data, the researchers conducted on-site observations at four selected luxury hotels in Hong Kong, paying close attention to aspects including the physical setting, interaction between staff and guests, and the overall atmosphere. Furthermore, in-depth unstructured interviews were carried out with hotel management and staff, allowing the participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions freely. Lastly, the researchers reviewed online comments from a popular review platform to gain insights into guests' experiences and satisfaction levels at the hotels selected for the on-site observations and interviews.

During the data collection process, the researchers took field notes to record their observations, experiences, and reflections. Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study by corroborating findings from multiple methods and data sources and through the involvement of all the researchers in the data collection and analysis process. The researchers then participated in a collaborative coding process of the data to categorise and describe their meaning. Through the coding process, themes emerged and were agreed upon by the researcher's consensus to form the basis of the proposed model.

FINDINGS

Upon comparing the four properties examined in this study, it becomes evident that the controlling ownership group is small and limited to a majority stake held by a single family or institution. These hotels share the commonality of being closely connected to a family or institution, directly influencing the owner's reputation and, by extension, their maintenance of 'face' (Chen & Chon, 2016). The desire to display wealth and offer hospitality to the community and dignitaries is also linked to *Guan Xi* (關係) in supporting the building of long-lasting relationships that can lead to further success and profits (Chon & Hao, 2020). Consequently, these cultural norms and contributing factors shape the owners' approach and the corporate culture of the hotels.

During site visits and observations of Asian-ness in hotel services, three aspects emerged as demonstrative of Asian-ness services: sentimental expressions, ceremonial behaviours, and cultural innovations. Sentimental expressions encompass the welcoming of guests, integrating Confucianism Asian philosophies such as *Qian Bei* (谦卑), *Gong Jing* (恭敬), and *Tie Xin* (贴心) into the services provided. Hotel staff deliver services with gentleness, sincerity, natural warmth, humbleness, and kindness, offering a "heart-to-heart" thoughtful service (*Tie Xin*, 贴心) to their guests. Ceremonial behaviours involve making the intangible tangible, while cultural innovations reflect the hotels' commitment to developing interactive and engaging activities that enhance guest experiences (Walls et al., 2011). These culture-based innovations facilitate value co-creation with guests and contribute to creating "unforgettable experiences."

The Asian-ness design components distinguish these hotels from the competition,

providing a unique oriental traditional culture within the hotel environment. Traditional red or yellow colours, lighting, and Asian arts evoke a sense of ancient Eastern history (Chen, 2022), offering customers a distinct value and experience. From a hotel management perspective, ancient Chinese *Feng Shui* (風水) and *Qi Shi* (气势) concepts significantly impact life and fortune. By incorporating these principles, the Asian-ness hospitality design creates a peaceful environment for hotel guests and employees.

A review of online customer ratings and comments revealed positive attitudes towards the service, corporate culture, and design in all four hotels. Two hotels received a rating of 5 out of 5, with service ratings of 87% and 89%, while the other two were rated 4.5 out of 5, achieving service ratings of 80% and 84%, respectively. This demonstrates the overall customer satisfaction with the Asian-ness hospitality experience provided by these establishments.

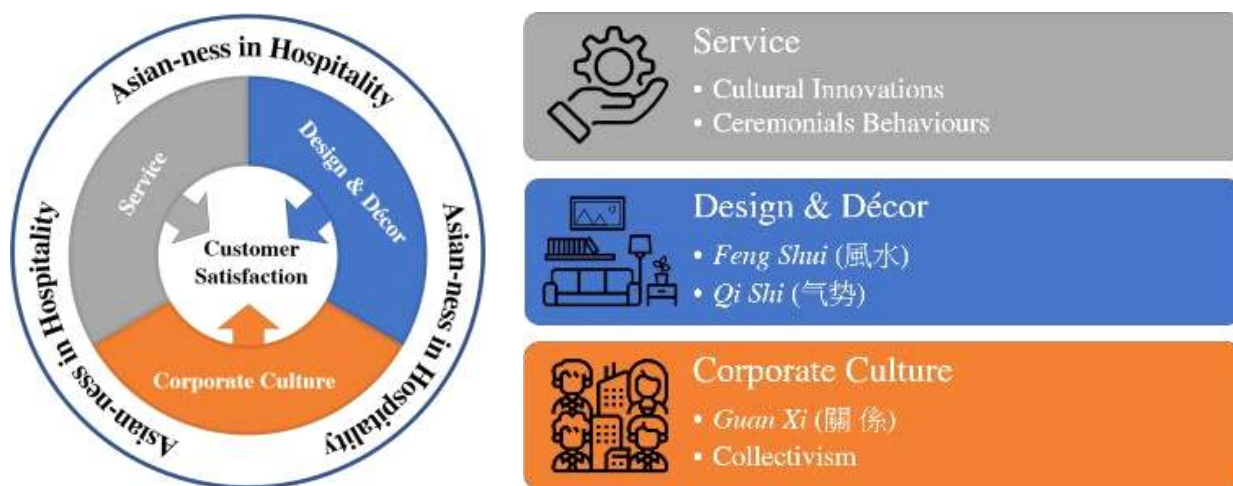


Figure 1. Asian-ness in Hospitality Business Model

CONCLUSION

This study proposes a concise three-dimensional business model for 'Asian-ness in hospitality', focusing on corporate culture, services, and design and their relationship with customer satisfaction. The model illustrates the interconnection between these essential dimensions and their impact on customer satisfaction. Given the future trends in hospitality and tourism in Asia, this study offers valuable insights for practitioners to revisit the role of Asian-ness in hospitality in hotel operations and management, answers a gap in academic literature,

and provides a model and foundation for future studies.

REFERENCES

- Albrecht, K., & Zemke, R. (1985). *Service America! : doing business in the new economy*. Dow Jones-Irwin.
- Chen, A. L., & Chon, K. (2016). Transferability of Asian paradigm in hospitality management to non-Asian countries. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 12, 143-157. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Chen, C. L. (2022). Strategic sustainable service design

- for creative-cultural hotels: a multi- level and multi-domain view. *Local Environment*, 27(1), 46–79.
- Chin, D. , Pinthong, C., Kang, Y., & Chon, K. (2016). What makes Asian hospitality unique? An exploratory analysis , differences in willingness to pay for a restaurant menu price according to hedonic variables. In *Asia Pacific Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education Conference [APacCHRIE Conference]*.
- Chon, K. S. (2019). *Hospitality in Asia: A new paradigm*. Routledge.
- Chon, K., & Hao, F. (2020). The five constants: A Confucian business model for the hospitality industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research (Washington, D.C.)*, 44(7), 1051-1071.
- Chon, K., Park, E., & Zoltan, J. (2020). The Asian paradigm in hospitality and tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 44(8), 1183-1202.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Fakfare, P., Talawanich, S., Pongwat, A., & Chon, K. (2019). Asianness in hospitality: The case of luxury hotels in Bangkok, Thailand. *ASEAN Journal of Management & Innovation*, 6(2), 77-92.
- Gilbert, D., & Tsao, J. (2000). Exploring Chinese cultural influences and hospitality marketing relationships. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12(1), 45-53.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Sage.
- Heffernan, T., & Droulers, M. (2008). East and West: the successful integration of cultures at Shangri-La, Sydney. *The Marketing Review*, 8(3), 297-309.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis : an expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Piuchan, M., & Pang, L. (2015). Service experience dimensions in Asian hospitality: A case study of hotels in Thailand and Hong Kong. In *EuroCHRIE Conference 2015*. Manchester Metropolitan University Manchester, UK.
- Tan, E., Cherapanukorn, V., Kim, H. H., & Chon, K. (2014). The art of service in Asia: A conceptual framework through a case study of the hospitality industry in Thailand. In *Proceedings of the Global Tourism and Hospitality Conference and 11th Asia Tourism Forum*, 1217-1244.
- Walls, A., Okumus, F., Wang, Y., & Kwun, D. J. W. (2011). Understanding the consumer experience: An exploratory study of luxury hotels. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 20(2), 166-197.
- Wan, S., & Chon, K. (2010). “Asianness” – an emerging concept in hospitality management. In *8th Asia Pacific Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education Conference [APacCHRIE Conference]*, 175–186.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2d ed.). Sage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers thank Professor Kaye Chon, Dean of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, for sharing his deep insights on the Asian Paradigm of Hospitality and imparting his experience and knowledge to them throughout the development process of this paper and beyond.