THE INFLUENCES OF ASIAN CULTURAL VALUES IN THE ASIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES

Conference Paper · May 2013

CITATIONS 0
READS 2,334

4 authors, including:

Worarak Sucher
National Institute of Development Administr...
1 PUBLICATION 0 CITATIONS

Arif Kamisan Pusiran
Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)
5 PUBLICATIONS 20 CITATIONS

Kaye Chon
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
239 PUBLICATIONS 5,323 CITATIONS

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

AF DETECTION IN COMMUNITY View project

MARINE EDUCATION & PUBLIC AWARENESS: Towards a Sustainably Developed Marine Park View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Arif Kamisan Pusiran on 27 August 2015.
The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.
THE INFLUENCES OF ASIAN CULTURAL VALUES IN THE ASIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES

Worarak Sucher
(Correspondent Author)
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Arif Kamisan Pusiran
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Nate-tra Dhevabanchachai
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Kaye Chon
School of Hotel and Tourism Management
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Asian hospitality has gained a reputation for excellence in quality of facilities and services over the past decade. The unique, lovely ways of Asian hospitality spring from its strong historical and cultural background. Asian cultures and their peoples have special hand-making skills and are detail orientated which can be seen from the products produced and services provided by Asian organizations. They have a strong cultural education in the sense of “kindness and giving”. This makes them well suited for providing the required unique services and able to respond to the demands of this new century. This paper aims to enhance the understanding of the influence that Asian
cultures and values have on Asian hospitality. In addition, it focuses how it manifests itself in the uniquely Asian characteristic in the hospitality industry. The findings illustrate that Asian hospitality is well accepted worldwide and that a continued fine tuning is needed to create the perfect Asian hospitality experience. It is of an interest to both practitioners and academic educators in the hospitality management field.

Key Words: Asian hospitality service, Asian cultural value, Asian service characteristic, Asian hospitality industry

INTRODUCTION

The Asia Pacific region has been the fastest growing tourist popular destination and presents the largest growth opportunities in the global hospitality industry in this century (Hing et al., 1998). It has an average growth in the 5 - 6 % ranges compared to the continuing uncertainty in Europe and the USA (UNWTO, 2012). The Asian hospitality industry today consistently receives compliments worldwide for its service excellence (McBride, 2010; Roll, 2012; Sonia, 2012). Service quality in the hospitality industry is widely researched in the current economic globalization (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Mohsin, 2006), to achieving a sustainable competitive advantage which is recognized as the dominant factor in a business organization’s success. Demands for, and supplies of, Asian hospitality services have intensified the growth of the hospitality industry globally, leading to intense competition in the market-place (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000).

Traveler reviews on “Tripadvisor” regarding Shangri-La Hotel Paris, with five stars given for “Excellence of service”, ranks at the top in guest satisfaction. Comments were generally given about the brilliant and exceptional services provided by Asian staff that made guests feel welcome and as being treated well. Staff characteristics are the top topic generated in the reviews such as being smart, efficient, intuitive, caring, warm, with nice manners, smiles, cherry greetings, friendly, helpful, polite, dignified and eager to provide service (Tripadvisor, 2012). The local Asian hospitality chains are showing significant growth, not only within the region, but also worldwide (McBride, 2010). They are
expanding globally; slowly but steadily. For instance, Hong Kong’s Shangri-La and Mandarin Oriental, Japan’s JAL Hotels, Singapore’s Banyan Tree, Malaysia’s Holiday Villa, and Thailand’s Dusit International are progressing in number of properties in 2013. Mandarin Oriental hotels are already in many prominent European and US cities; whilst Shangri-La and Banyan Tree are expanding to enter the European market.

A greater quantity of hotels means higher visibility, greater brand awareness and service excellence, leading to higher demand, income, financial power, and expansion (Tan, 2012). In the past, Europeans and Americans were well known as pioneers in the hospitality industry for their high standards and flair in delivering service (Mohsin, 2006; Matilla, 1999). Western hospitality service focuses on discipline, while Asian hospitality tends to take the ‘middle path’ between discipline and human relations management. This is due to Asians being better known for their hospitable nature. The emerging demand for an Asian hospitality experience has pushed the hospitality industry to supply this demand by sharing the beauty and uniqueness of Asian hospitality with the world. It has been recognized in the past decade for excellence in service and quality (Stebbing, 1990).

The Asian region is now a leader of the global hospitality service industry due to its unique service approaches and practices. This is evidenced by the fact that a large number of world’s most reputable hospitality and tourism businesses are based in Asia. The Asian hospitality service keeps a sharp eye on trends to keep abreast of popular demands. They have been providing the unique services that are shaped by their cultures and values and have experienced optimum growth every year (Sonia, 2012; Gong, 2008). The objective of this paper is to enhance the understanding of Asian hospitality services and to identify those unique characteristics of Asian cultures and values which have influenced on the development of Asia’s hospitality industry. It is of an interest to both practitioners and academic educators in the hospitality management field.

ASIAN CULTURAL VALUES AND ASIAN CHARACTERISTICS

A latent relationship
The Asian hospitality approach is greatly influenced by its strong historical and cultural background values (Heffernan & Droulers, 2008; Wan & Chon, 2010). This is irrespective of one’s nationality. Unlike other regions, the hospitality sector in Asia is regulated to differentiate its properties in different locations on the basis of their unique tangible and intangible products. This is usually related to its geography, culture, social factors and the professionalism of their service providers (Gong, 2008; Mohsin, 2006). Their unique products and services have been designed to capture the local historical and cultural background and to spread growth and success internationally. The characteristics of Asia’s hospitality are categorized by distinguishing the establishment’s human resources and service quality by several singularities.

The nature of the Asian people itself is the biggest asset in elevating the model of Asian hospitality service implemented worldwide; the warm and caring services are deeply rooted by their cultural background. Respectful expression and detail orientation are an impressive integration of upbringing modern Asian hospitality service to a more holistic approach. It also enhances the value of services and creates memorable guests’ experiences (Lugosi, 2008; Syer, 2011). The modest and courteousness of the Asian people itself with a smiling face, being humble, genuine and demonstrating polite behavior in both verbal and non-verbal cues. Displaying a hospitable heart and service-minded attitude, are part of the unique characteristics of their values upholding in and elevating the model of Asian hospitality (Wan & Chon, 2010; Chappel & Lane, 1998; Mohsin, 2006). The inherent collectivistic values among Asians are the key ingredients in the melting pot of Asian hospitality services. This comes from upbringing, culture and religion and is reflected as uniquely Asian characteristics (Mohsin, 2006).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework arising from the study; it explains the components that encompass the establishment of the Asian Hospitality Service. The strength of the Asian Hospitality relies heavily on the cultures and ethics resulting from the religious and historical aspects of the Asian people. The combinations of these aspects mold their cultural values that shaped the strong formation of Asian Hospitality which embrace the characteristics. Chappel & Lane (1998) mentioned that the unique characteristic of Asians as stated previously proves to be the indication that Asian people
have a very highly hospitality sense. The nature or the values that Asian people carried should be maintained and upheld for the future of the industry. The focus and demand of the industry is now moving towards the Asian market therefore it will significantly contribute to the success of Asian hospitality. All these values embedded in the “soul” of mostly Asian people are the best ingredients to establish hospitality services of the highest quality standard.

The model seems to be very ideal as it can be explained for three strong reasons. Firstly, the nature of the Asians is naturally embedded with all the values which could be perfect in applying the Asian Hospitality service to be adopted in the hospitality sectors. Secondly, the hospitality market in the Asian region is still emerging and has a big potential for expansion in the future. Therefore, in preparing the human capital working for the hospitality industry should be relatively easier due to the bigger population in Asia compared to the world at large. Thirdly, the nature of Asian people who typically respect and pay attention to their elders makes it easier for them to observe, listen and be taught how to be employed in the service industry.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Asian Hospitality Service Framework

ASIAN HOSPITALITY SERVICES
A modern authentic hospitality worldwide

Asian Hospitality has gained a reputation for excellence in quality of facilities and service over the past decade. It continues to lead in sensitivity towards the particular needs of customers within hospitality and cultural-based services (McBride, 2010). Asian hotel brands such as Shangri-la, Marco Polo, Mandarin Oriental, Dusit group, etc. are successfully establishing and expanding their brands internationally (Smith & Siguaw, 2010; Sonia 2012; Roll, 2012). The ‘Asian flavour’ prevalent in different locations can still differentiate between the properties (Gong, 2008; Mohsin, 2006) by offering Asian hospitality services that can be expressed and experienced in several ways through both tangible and intangible forms. In this connection, even the design and environment of Asian hotels have been created with the insertion of the traditional motifs and heritage elements that makes them different from the traditional boxy concept of a hotel. Unique approaches and practices in Asian hospitality are also noticed in the special handmade and detail oriented products and excellent services that create the competitive advantage in generating uniqueness, profitability and success to the hotels (Qingxue, 2003).

Asian hospitality services can be differentiated from other regions’ hospitality services by the uniqueness and characteristics of Asian service providers. These are those who have the services “DNA” with a hospitality-minded heart and service-minded attitude, who wants others to be happy, who are helpful and ready to give, and who understands fully what “family style” means (Chappel & Lane, 1998). The courtesy and humble nature of the Asian people elevating the creative and caring service given to the guest creates an emotional feeling and memorable experience; it is their upbringing to respect guests and elderly people as this is well rooted in Asian culture (Mohsin, 2006). Asian cultures and their peoples have special hand-making skills and are detail orientated; as can be seen from the products produced and services provided by Asian hospitality organizations. They have a strong cultural education in the sense of “kindness and giving” which makes them well suited for providing the required unique services and are able to respond to the demands of this new century.
Asian people are very blessed, with their creative hands producing a great quantity of produce from food, products for beauty and health, to many decorative items that enhance the uniqueness of being Asian. Asian creativity is expressed through products to enhance their prestigious look and exclusivity, thereby increasing their value. The Asian region has many differences in culture and nationality and is expressed by the unique characteristics of each nation. However, there is an instantly recognizable image of “Asian” products and services. (Mohsin, 2006). The selection of a unique name when branding a hotel often highlights the Asian pride in their origins and cultures to portray an image representing a historically meaning hotel brand and operations (Hanson & Lynch, 2004). A good example of this can been shown with the Dusit Thani brand, which means “place of heaven”, and conveys the philosophy of the hotel as having “high class and exclusive service” by cultivating under the brand “Dusit” (Dusit Hotel, 2009; Wan & Chon, 2010). Shangri-La Hotel however, believes in the philosophy of ‘hospitality from caring family’, showing ‘pride without arrogance’ and providing their guests with distinctive, yet humble Asian hospitality and service (Shangri-La, 2012). The Mandarin Oriental’s trademark logo is connecting luxurious Asian symbols and elegant service images with their commitment of making a difference every day; striving to completely delight and satisfy their guests (Mandarin Oriental, 2012).

Supplementing the unique Asian hospitality experience is the setting which incorporates the concept of Asian traditional motifs and architectures into the overall hotel design. Use of popular heritage elements such as streams, small bridges, water jars, pots, building on posts using split bamboo, and thatch roofs with mixed ethnic characteristics, creates the image of the Asian hospitality setting. Such an environment and decoration have created a unique innovation and evolution of Asian hospitality experience by inserting the Asian spirit into a more contemporary style (Qingxue, 2003). Another method of enhancing the way of Asian hospitality is by adding an element of traditional costume into the design features of the employees’ work uniforms. This has proven to enhance the beauty and standard of hospitality in creating the best Asian hospitality model with special characteristics.

Although the diversity of Asian cultures is reflected in a myriad of differing social
etiquette displays and manners; a unity of Asian behaviors can still be seen in similar behaviors across cultures (Hanson & Lynch, 2004). The Thai traditional greeting called “Wai”, which is done by placing the palms together at chest level, bowing slightly and placing the fingertips at different levels to indicate respect and hierarchy, has become a common way of greeting guests in Asian hospitality. “Wai” is similar to “Namaste” in India whereby the palms are placed together below the face as a show of respect to others. Additionally, the bowing of the Japanese at different degree angles commonly shows the respect of status of the person they greet (Shapiro, 2010). These are the expressive procession of a gentle and heart-touching gesture of Asian service providers.

The unique Asian hospitality undergoes an ideal paradigm in transferring the unique Asian hospitality to the world’s hospitality service by internationalizing the Asian ‘DNA’ as a standard of global service culture and service delivery (Matilla, 1999; Mohsin, 2006; Smith & Siguaw, 2010; Nankervis, 2000). As the Asia Pacific region has shown significant growth in the international hospitality and tourism industry, many international hotel brands such as Accor, Starwood, Marriott, Hilton, etc. have broadened their investment within the region. This is due to the slow growth of economies in Europe and declining western hospitality investment. On the other hand, Asian hotel brands are capitalizing on the opportunity by developing and expanding their brands within and outside the region. The convergence of these two phenomena reflects the idea of ‘transferability’ whereby the European accommodation developers are looking towards the Asian market and aiming to provide Asian hospitality in their hotel brands. This could help to distinguish themselves from other European brands and cater for the demand of Asian hospitality among international tourists around the world. Meanwhile, Asian hotel brands are extending their interests to other parts of the world, partly to satisfy higher demands of Asian tourists, particularly Chinese, travelling to Europe and the United States (Sonia, 2012; Smith & Siguaw, 2010; McBride, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper illustrates that Asian hospitality promises a great opportunity for continued growth into the future and is heading in the right direction to be the best
service practice methodology in the hospitality industry. In the past, Europeans and Americans were well known as pioneers in the hospitality industry for their efficiency, high standards and flair in delivering service. As the trend has changed in the new millennium, the Asian hospitality seems to be a more viable practice with a little adjustment and fine-tuning. The Asian way of hospitality should be the best practice forthcoming. The characteristics of Asian hospitality can be categorized through unique corporate brand names with meanings in relation to culture, religion or history; cultural uniforms; traditional greetings and welcome tokens or drinks; special details ranging from food, health, beauty to various decorative items of hand-made skills, etc. With the insertion of the Asian spirit into the design, landscape and decoration of the hotel, it highlights a typical Asian unique environment in a more contemporary style different from the traditional or classic concept of a Western hotel.

The hospitality industry is a service-based provider industry and is people-oriented in its services (Nankervis, 2000; Chappel & Lane, 1998). To create an Asian based hospitality industry and retain competitiveness in the international hospitality market, Asian brands are spreading their wings worldwide and internationalizing their service standards by focusing on service delivery to enhance customers' experience. Development of Asian human resources is used to provide better service quality along with their unique characteristics. The distinguished nature of their unique styles and dimensions of service quality are implemented by their Asian workforce. Satisfaction of hotel employees can lead to solid business performance and service quality, which is vital to repeat business and ongoing profitability. It is an imperative challenge for managers in leading, organizing and empowering their staff to promote better service in Asian hospitality settings. Selecting the right potential staff with the right attitudes, setting up of performance standards for staff to adapt to, undergoing training and reinforcements and good reward systems will encourage higher satisfaction to staff and retention to the company (Nankervis, 2000; Gong, 2008).

In addition, Asian hotel providers should be more concerned about the cross cultural values and characteristic ‘Asian flavor’ service as an iconic identity towards a global acceptance in the future as well as competitive edge to lead ultimately to
sustainable advantage in the business world. With the unique Asian quality service holding the competitive advantage over rivals, the blending of eastern and western cultural values will enhance more professionalism and enriching the standardization of service quality in the global market. Nonetheless, customer experience encountered during the service delivery process as well as interaction between a guest and service provider, is an opportunity for the guest to form an impression about Asian hospitality and services (Farzaneh & Jamil, 2011; Roll, 2012; Chappel & Lane, 1998). It is in this process of interaction, whereby the respect and courtesy one receives, impacts the entire experience; from making reservations until check out. Maintaining good customer relationships entices hotels to attract customers, both new and returnees. Enticing them to be loyal to the product will be successful in reducing the cost of marketing and operations, increasing quality and efficiency, thus leading to increased profitability (Amonca58, 2012; Higgin, 2010).

Businesses today are facing aggressive competition; they have to make efforts to survive in a competitive and uncertain market place. People have realized that managing customer relationships is a fundamental factor for the sustainability of the business to build long-lasting relationships with their customers to increase their profits through an appropriate management system and the application of customer-focused strategies (Amonca58, 2012; Higgin, 2010). The system will work well when trust is built between the hotel, as a service provider, and the guest, who knows what to expect from the hotel. Meanwhile, hospitality businesses should practice customer analysis; it is a technique that provides a systematic method for collecting, distilling and prioritizing customer needs. It helps in recognizing and treating each and every customer at an individual level. It is very important for hotels to know about their guests and how to differentiate their services according to their guests’ specific requirements and to what will most satisfy the value stream customers (McBride, 2010). Service providers would do well to improve or maintain the expectation level of service to the guest. “Observe, Understand, Analyze, Adjust” are crucial concepts to hospitality service providers to tailor their services/products to suit individual guests’ needs and preferences and integrate with the “unlike” Asian hospitality services (Syer, 2011; McBride, 2010).
RECOMMENDATION

Due to the emerging demand of Asian hospitality service experience worldwide, the Asian Hospitality way has been well received in many regions. The following 7-test recommendations are proposed to service providers in order to maintain and enhance the strengths and fine tuning of unique Asian hospitality services and “Asian-ness” service quality:

1. Are we copying others? Asian people must be original in their own unique way. They should ensure they are not copying others.
2. Are we truly over-doing things? Due to the unique characteristics, Asian people may like to review whether they are over doing anything that may not be liked by guests.
3. Are we truly sincere, humble, genuine and kind? The world is changing. There is much evolution of development, more of high “tech” and low touch. Asian people should not lose their core values. Would they want to continue to be humble, kind and genuine in the coming future?
4. Are we self-motivating? Due to the evolution of development, customers are more demanding. Asian people not only have to keep their core values but also be ready for more flexibility. Therefore, Asian people need to be self-motivators, as there are many things to consider and adjust. Service is not as simple as in the past, as not only are guests more varied but there are higher expectations that need to be met.
5. Are we systematic, creative, efficient, and ethical? In keeping with good core values about being Asian, guests are increasingly demanding flexibilities in many aspects of service. Asian people must ask themselves whether they can be more systematic, efficient, ethical and creative.
6. Are we good at communication? The world is getting smaller due to the high degree of technological development. Asian people must develop their communication skills from language to technique and style; in order to serve various types and styles of guests.
7. Are we ready to blend all different Asian values into one? To be truly unique in “Asian-ness”, should an Asian service be blended with unique characteristics and values of different cultures from different Asian countries?

Finally, there is a need for more of the unique Asian service quality values to sync up with the future progression and development of the competitive global hospitality experience to ensure higher professionalism and standardization of service quality. A molding of a combination of these characteristics, i.e. warmth, empathy, courtesy, helpful, respect, kindness, friendly etc., the cultural values that have shaped Asian Hospitality, has enormous potential for expansion in the future.

REFERENCES


Qingxue, L. (2003). Understanding different cultural patterns or orientations between East and West. Investigationes Linguisticae, 8, Poznan.


