Do Chinese tourists find their in-group members more trustworthy than out-group members in an overseas context?

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Introduction

There is an increasing awareness of using cultural values to understand Chinese consumers. For instance, hospitality researchers have found that face and harmony significantly impact on Chinese consumers' satisfaction, service choices and behavioural patterns (e.g. Hoare & Butcher, 2008; Lee & Sparks, 2007; Gilbert & Tsao, 2000; Eckhardt & Houston, 2002; Lockyer & Tsai, 2004). However, no research to date has explored what the core cultural values are within the context of Chinese tourists' overseas dining, despite the fact that dining is one of the most popular activities for Chinese travellers (Law, To & Goh, 2008; Cai, Lehto & O'Leary, 2001; Li & Carr, 2004; Wang & Qu, 2004). More specifically, little research has addressed how these values change under different contexts; or how the context changes the manifestation of such values. For instance, do Chinese consumers behave similarly in the dining context when they are at their neighbourhood restaurant versus as a tourist visiting an overseas restaurant? Do other core values emerge in the overseas restaurant context in addition to the commonly cited ones of face and harmony? How do these core values affect Chinese tourists' evaluation of service outcomes? With mainland China becoming an emerging outbound tourism market worldwide, an inquiry into the above-raised cultural aspects in this particular hospitality context has practical implications. Put simply, it can offer a better understanding of Chinese consumers' behaviour, and thus help relevant international hospitality sectors formulate timely and effective managerial and marketing strategies.

To date, face, harmony and trustworthiness have been identified as core values in the Chinese tourists' overseas dining context (cf. Hoare, Butcher & O'Brien, 2009). The underlying meanings and implications of face and harmony were elaborated by Hoare et al. This paper chooses to focus on discussing the core value of trustworthiness.

The Western organisational management literature suggests that the three factors of ability, benevolence and integrity can explain a major portion of trustworthiness (Mayer, Davies & Shoorman, 1995). According to Mayer et al., ability is that group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that allow a party to have influence within some domain. Benevolence is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an

egocentric profit motive. Finally, integrity is defined as the trustor's perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable. Yet, in the Chinese context, it is reported that Chinese people's understanding of trustworthiness is shaped by Confucian influence, and a general set of factors may not be adequate to understand trustworthiness in the Chinese cultural setting (Tan & Chee, 2005). Meanwhile, there is also evidence demonstrating that Chinese thinking of trustworthiness overlaps with the Western conceptualisation (Chen & Chen, 2004). Hence, the first research question is identified as: What are the underlying meanings of trustworthiness within Chinese tourists' overseas dining context?

Furthermore, social identity theory suggests that people are attracted to others who are familiar to themselves because their similarity reinforces their self-image (Tajfel, 1982), and that people from collectivist culture tend to favour in-group members and discriminate against out-group members (Gomez, Kirkman & Shapiro, 2000). Individuals used different categories to define in-group/out-group membership in various situations (Fischer, Gainer & Bristor, 1997). In the current study, in-group members are identified as people who are perceived as coming from the same race and sharing the same culture. In investigating trustworthiness and membership category, research results indicate that individuals tend to perceive out-group members as less trustworthy and less honest (Brewer & Silver, 1978), and tend to be attracted to those whose race and attitudes are similar to them (Stockdale & Crosby, 2004). In a cross-cultural context, Armstrong and Yee (2001) found that dialect fluency, and perceived cultural similarity contributed to perceptions of trustworthiness between ethnic Chinese buyers and sellers in Malaysia. While it is suggested that similarities in race and culture positively influence trustworthiness impression (Koojaroenpaisan, 1996; McAllister, 1995), no research has explored if and/or how group membership difference affect Chinese people's perception of trustworthiness when they tour overseas. Hence, the second research question is identified as: How does in-group/out-group membership affect Chinese people's perception of trustworthiness in the overseas dining context?