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An American hotel expatriate's view on Chinese culture: Perspectives on cultural dimensions and managerial philosophies

This study analyzes an American hotel expatriate's view on Chinese culture and proposes different perspectives on cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1981; 2001), management philosophies (Baird, Lyles, & Wharton, 1990), and implications for diversity in the hospitality business. Data were collected through an in-depth interview with a key informant from the Chinese business culture within the hotel industry. Findings reveal that Chinese business culture is more focused on individual identity (i.e., who the person is) rather than organizational representativeness (i.e., what organization the person represents). Additionally, findings reveal Chinese business culture within the hotel industry focuses on the umbrella concept explaining "power distance" and bureaucratic behaviors (i.e., formality and rigidity) and influences toward a person's attitude. These findings provide a chance to extrapolate different aspects of the cultural dimensions and management philosophies within the evolving Chinese culture. They can also suggest pragmatic hospitality managerial implications such as updating specific manners and etiquette and abolishing stereotypes in interacting with Chinese customers and business partners.

Keywords: Culture, China, the United States, power distance, managerial philosophies, hospitality business, American, hotel, Chinese

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Introduction

The United States is a so-called “melting pot” which means it has a diverse ethnic and cultural mixture in the society. Diversity in the workplace means accepting different kinds of people with different backgrounds of culture, ethnicity, age, race, ability, sexual orientation, and so on (Green, Lopez, Wysocki, & Kepner, 2002). There are several positive effects of having diverse employees in the organization. Diversity not only supports the utilization of various efficient skills and knowledge, but also enhances the value of an organization’s employees (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998), allows the organization to recruit and retain the best talent (Iles, 1995; Ross & Schneider, 1992), enables more creativity within an organization (Iles, 1995; McNerny, 1994), reduces costs related to turnover and absenteeism (Ross & Schneider, 1992), and increases resilience and flexibility (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998). Such qualities are cherished in the hotel industry, which is the focus of this paper.

In other research, several upsides and downsides of having an ethnically and culturally diverse workforce are mentioned, especially in the hotel industry context (Christensen-Hughes, 1992). The positive effects of having ethnically diverse employees in the organization are as follows: (a) the new immigrant groups provide a large source of potential labor; (b) the work environment is enriched by multiple cultures; (c) the hotels are better able to meet the needs of diverse customers, and (d) new market segments are attached to culturally diverse customers. The negative effects of having an ethnic and culturally diverse workforce are from departmental concentration of ethnic groups, from language differences, and from cultural differences (Christensen-Hughes, 1992).

The workforce in the hotel industry in the United States as well as around the globe has been and will be diverse. It is anticipated that by the 2050s the composition of the workforce will be more diverse regarding race and ethnicity. The non-Hispanic white workforce will decrease to 50% in the total workforce while Hispanic and Asian workers will make up about 35% of the total workforce (Margo, 2016; Schiller, 2005). The U.S.-based global hotel chains

and franchises such as Marriott, Hilton, and several casino hotels in Las Vegas such as Sands and the Venetian have not only deployed expatriates from headquarters but also hired employees from the local areas and different nationalities. The mixture of cultures among employees has increased as the global hotel market has expanded. It means that the growing hospitality industry will need to have employees to run their growing number of properties. Perhaps more importantly, employees in the hospitality industry, more specifically the hotel industry, should reflect their customer demographics, which then presents a more culturally diverse team of employees. For example, especially for the international tourist destinations (e.g., Macau, Las Vegas) would need to hire a Chinese-speaking concierge to accommodate the Chinese travelers.

The cultural difference among managers and employees has to be studied to improve the academic and managerial efficiency of managing employees with different cultural backgrounds. Research has been done to guide marketers and practitioners in developing information and policies for managing employees with diverse cultural backgrounds. Empirical research studies argue there is a lack of generalizability of theories proposed based on Western business cultures to explain Asian business cultures (Wijewardena, 1992; Sharp & Salter, 1997). A recent study suggested the necessity of more research to be done to explain the paradigm shift between Eastern and Western business culture (Rohlfers & Zhang, 2016).

From the managerial perspective, the theories that lack generalizability can be misconstrued by managers in the field and lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, and failing to induce employees' potential to exercise performance. This study elaborates on some basic cultural differences to contribute to future research in the hospitality area.

The purpose of this study was to provide practical insights on the cultural differences in the hospitality industry. More specifically, this case study provides description and insights

about how Western managers in the hotel industry perceive the hotel industry in accordance with Chinese culture. This analysis through an in-depth interview will help understand the Western cultural point of view on Chinese culture and managerial implications for increasing diversity at work in the United States.

Literature Review

Culture is defined as “transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior” (Kroeber & Parsons, 1958, p. 583). Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “the collective programming of mind, which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p. 9). He defined the cultural dimensions by comparing values, behaviors, institution, and organizations. Cultural dimensions are the factors differentiating one country from another or one region from another (Hofstede, 1980).

Sociology researchers have provided generalizable theoretical approaches to national cultural differences. There are generally two well-known theoretical cultural dimensions frameworks. One was suggested by Hofstede (1980; 2001) and the other by Schwartz (1999). Hofstede’s cultural dimensions were developed from the data collect from IBM employees around the globe while Schwartz’s dimensions were developed from college students. Considering that this study was focused on the hospitality business culture, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are adopted for the purpose of the study.

The dimensions most widely analyzed and found valid are power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), individualism/collectivism, and femininity/masculinity. PD is the degree to which the less powerful members of society expect there to be differences in the levels of power. A high score suggests that there is an expectation that some individuals wield larger amounts of power than others (*e.g.*, boss and subordinates). A low score reflects

the view that all people should have equal rights. Uncertainty avoidance (UA) should not be confused with “risk avoidance”. UA is about how humans deal with basic facts of future uncertainty and human life (*e.g.*, law, religion, technology, rule, norms, ceremony, etc.). Individualism and collectivism is level of integration into groups and one of the most distinguishing cultural characteristics between Asian and Western culture. Individualism emphasizes individual over the group, where people maintain low-level membership within groups. Western cultures have offered evidence of individualism. In contrast, collectivism supports strong relationships toward groups, loyalty to those groups, and support during conflict. Asian cultures have traditionally shown qualities of collectivism.

Femininity and masculinity display the relative difference of whether people in the culture respond to personal life and career in more feminine or masculine ways. For example, if the overall cultural tendency of career success is more focused on the employee’s ability than building good teamwork and relationships at work, the culture is relatively close to masculinity.

Some of these cultural dimensions were found to have distinguishable effects on management practice (Hofstede, 1980). In Hofstede’s research, PD and UA revealed differences between American and some Asian managers in terms of their perspective on managerial philosophies. Managers in Asian countries showed higher PD scores than managers in the United States; employees in these countries showed obedience, conformity, autocratic decision making, and needing close supervision. It was suggested that the differences might come from a Confucian-influenced background (Baird, Lyles, & Wharton, 1990). Hong-Kong, Taiwan, and Japan showed higher UA scores and employees showed emotional resistance to change, greater loyalty to employers, a large generation gap, seniority-based promotion, clearer hierarchies, a preference for clear instructions, and a suspicion of foreign managers. In contrast, the United States and Singapore employees

showed less hesitation to change; younger managers in terms of age; strong achievement motivation; hope for success; risk taking and ambition; and a tolerance for breaking rules, conflict, competition, and delegation (Hofstede, 1980). Baird, Lyles, and Wharton (1990) combined PD and UA into management philosophy and found that there are significant cultural differences between American and Chinese managers. The current study adopted PD, UA, and management philosophies to analyze an American expatriate's view on Chinese culture.

Schwartz (1999), however, criticized cultural dimensions discovered by Hofstede (2001) for the following reasons: (1) Hofstede's cultural dimensions are not exhaustive; (2) Hofstede's sample countries do not represent the full diversity of national cultures; (3) IBM employees who were the research subjects of Hofstede's study do not represent the overall population; and (4) major cultural changes have happened since the Hofstede research was conducted between 1967 and 1973. However, a number of empirical research studies have demonstrated that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are still valid enough to measure the cultural differences among countries (Cheung & Chan, 2008; Galin & Avraham, 2009; Claus & Hand, 2009; Tsai & Chi, 2009).

Considering the fact that the hospitality industry is about "people", it also needs to have a better understanding and theoretical approach for industry-specific cultural differences. This study provides some elaboration on what needs to be considered when it comes to extrapolating theoretical approaches for understanding cultural differences.

These cultural differences can be applied to management philosophies. For example, business negotiation processes between the U.S. and China can be shaped by the cultural differences (Tung, 1989). Baird et al. (1990) suggested relative differences of management philosophies such as participative/directive, democratic/authoritarian, individual/team, and consensus/competition between American and Chinese managers, which can provide useful

theoretical and managerial implications.

Generally, it has been known that Asian cultures have strong loyalty to family, community, work, modesty, respect and obedience to authority, sensitivity of others' attitudes, and a strong work ethic, combined with an overwhelming reluctance to complain, express emotions directly, and engage in confrontation (Blank & Slipp, 1994). Some of the Chinese cultural factors are strong local attachment (*e.g.*, guanxi, or personal relationships embedded in business), saving face (*e.g.*, respect for dignity and prestige), and numerous local dialects (*i.e.*, 150 different local dialects; Redding & Witt, 2008). In the current study, the characteristics of Chinese culture were analyzed regarding what might lie behind the culture, especially in the Chinese hotel industry.

The purpose of this study was to explore how an American hospitality expatriate views the Chinese culture in the hotel industry and proposes different perspectives for conceptualizing the cultural dimensions and management philosophies. Little qualitative research has been conducted in the hospitality industry to suggest different cultural perspectives for the existing theories and culturally relevant management philosophies. Although they have been validated in numerous empirical research studies, cultural dimensions suggested by Hofstede (1980; 2001) and Schwartz (1991) have been criticized as outdated (*e.g.*, Schwartz, 1994; Steenkamp, 2001). Diversity programs in certain venues have been analyzed based on the combination of interviews with human resource managers in hotels and analysis of existing company profiles (Groschl & Doherty, 1999). Some qualitative research studies (*i.e.*, stories from the diverse resources, using statistics and previous research) have been attempted (Christensen-Hughes, 1992; Maxwell, McDougall, & Blair, 2000). However, no study has been conducted focusing on an expert's experiences in multiple cultures.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

RQ: How does a former hotel executive and US expatriate view cultural differences between the United States and China within the hotel industry?

Methodology

The constructivist lens guided this study due to its strong belief that knowledge is constructed through interactions with the potential for multiple truths (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). The constructivist approach allowed for the truths of one participant to be understood while acknowledging that other truths may exist within the hotel industry. A case study methodology was used. Merriam (2009) defines case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). More specifically, this study contained exploratory qualities due to its reliance upon a key informant interview and little previous work in the area of study. Sofaer (2002) argues that key informant interviews have been a critical backbone to exploratory research, particularly when stakeholders and consumers are involved in the industry under study. Therefore, this study was a case in which a key informant interview with a participant from a closed environment within the hotel industry offered grounds for which to pursue more extended research.

Participant

An in-depth interview was conducted with a former hotel executive about his experiences working in the hotel industry with regards to cultural differences. Merriam (1995) states that the quality of results stemming from examining one participant’s experiences depends upon validity and reliability. To strengthen internal validity, member checks were conducted with the participant, allowing the participant to view his comments from interview transcripts and confirm what was said. Additionally, peer examinations were

conducted to allow colleagues to examine data and ensure accuracy of analysis, and a statement of the researchers' experiences and assumptions was included to offer a more transparent view of how the data was interpreted. Merriam (1995) states these three methods of internal validity are acceptable. Reliability can be strengthened through peer examination when a study relies on one participant (Merriam, 1995). For this study, the interpretation of data was provided to an industry expert with practical and academic experience. External validity may be considered a weakness of this study due to its low ability for generalization. However, generalizability was not the intent of this study, but rather the intent was to deeply explore the experiences of one former executive in the hotel industry to provide a foundation for future research.

The participant was a former executive manager who had worked in the Asian and U.S. hotel industries for 20 years as managing director of hotel properties as well as executive of diverse sales and supplies of hotels. The participant's extensive industry experience as not only an insider but also an outsider (*i.e., hotel supply sales executive*) provided different perspectives for the existing cultural dimensions. The participant was identified through convenience sampling through shared connections from the researchers and the hotel industry. The participant experiences would be valuable to understand how expatriates with Western cultural background view and understand Chinese culture, how implications can bridge the gap between American and Chinese cultural viewpoints, and how these implications can be applied to an increasingly diverse workforce in the U.S. hospitality industry. The participant was assigned the pseudonym Bryson Niles to protect his identity.

Data Collection

Marshall and Rossman (2006) offer three kinds of in-depth interview approaches: informal and conversational interviews, general interviews, and standardized and open-ended interviews. For this study, informal and open-ended interview methods were utilized. One

interview was conducted in March 2007 at a major university in the western United States and lasted approximately one hour. The interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder and transcribed by a professional transcriber. The interview session began with an informal conversation regarding subject matter that allowed the participant to guide the conversation about his experiences regarding cultural differences between China and the United States in the hotel industry. The interview session then progressed to more of an open-ended approach that allowed for greater depth in the conversation.

Interview questions were constructed based on findings from Hofstede (1980) and Baird et al. (1990). Interview questions were asked with regards to power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), characteristics of Chinese managers (C), and management philosophies. The interview questions developed are presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative method was used to analyze data, comparing a segment of the transcript with other segments of the transcript with a goal of determining similarities and differences (Merriam, 2009). Data were analyzed with a priori codes of PD, UA, Characteristics, Personal Management Philosophies, and Participant Interpretation using the color-coding method (Table 2). PD was assigned as blue, UA was assigned as red, Characteristics of Chinese managers was assigned as green, Personal Management Philosophies were assigned as yellow, and Participant Interpretation was assigned as black. Data were then analyzed using axial coding with the goal of organizing the information within the assigned a priori codes.

Table 1

Interview Questions

Categories	Questions	Relating to Hofstede (1980)
Power Distance (PD)	Could you describe the differences between Chinese and American employees in their behavior dealing with authority?	<u>Higher PD</u> More obligated to the authority
Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)	How did the managers act differently in dealing with uncertainty in their jobs?	<u>Higher UA</u> Stronger tendency to avoid the matter having uncertainty
Characteristic of managers	Could you talk about general characteristics of Asian managers?	<u>Characteristic of Asian manager</u> -Resistance to change -Greater loyalty to employer -A larger generation gap -Seniority based promotion -Clear hierarchies -A preference for clear instructions -Suspicion for foreign managers
Personal management philosophies	What management philosophies did you have when you were working as a manager in the hotel industry?	
Participant's own interpretation about cultural differences	How did you interpret those differences as an executive manager in the hotel industry?	

Table 2

Data Coding

Categories	Expected comments based on Hofstede (1980)	Related comments
PD	<u>Higher PD</u> -More obligated to the authority	a. Formality and rigidity b. Exceptions or new findings
UA	<u>Higher UA</u> -Stronger tendency to avoid the matter having uncertainty	a. Avoid confrontation b. Reserve
C	<u>Characteristic of Chinese manager</u> -Resistance to change -Greater loyalty to employer -A larger generation gap -Seniority based promotion -Clear hierarchies -A preference for clear instructions -Suspicion for foreign managers	a. Sensitivity of person's attitude b. Suspicion for foreigners
Personal management philosophies		a. Empowerment b. Educating customers c. Definition of culture, quality service in the hospitality and dissatisfaction
Participant's own interpretation about cultural differences		a. Affective reasoning -Perception in handling complaints -Perception as a guest in Chinese hotels b. Cognitive reasoning -Reasoning from society and history

Findings

Power Distance

Bryson discussed his experience about formality and rigidity of Chinese hotel managers with a story about a “wash rag”. He said that Chinese hotels and managers charged even to the “wash rag”, which explained that the hotel industry in China was particular about its budget. The term “wash rag” referred to the notion that Chinese hotels itemized used items within a patron’s room, even so much as charging for each towel or washcloth used in a room. Such action was unusual to Bryson and he related that kind of behavior to formality and rigidity often more visible within the country’s communist history.

“They don’t have to worry about getting fired, they don’t have to worry about competition, and they don’t have to worry about, you know, alternatives, because there is no alternative. Either you do it this way or you don’t stay here.”

Bryson provided his view about how he perceived the story as a cultural difference between Chinese hotels and U.S. hotels, which operate on a more consumer-based approach in which the tagline “the customer is always right” directs business. Bryson said the words “respect for authority” in relation to the Chinese management experiences, which is the central concept of PD.

The following comment was unexpected in that Chinese want to know about who the potential business partner is more than about how well-known the company is for which he or she works.

“They always wanted to know who I was. They didn’t want to know what company I was with. They wanted to know who I was, what my story was, which I liked, because that’s how I sell, you know, and how I teach, from a very personal perspective.”

If Chinese managers care about PD, they should be more concerned about “the power” of the organization that the person works for more than “who the person is.” The quote therefore

offers an interesting perspective in that Chinese managers try to indirectly figure out the reality of the “power” of the company by examining the representative’s behaviors and attitude.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Bryson explained how a tendency within the culture is to avoid confrontation. He shared a story when he and his translator visited the “Toothbrush Town.” Toothbrush Town is a small industrial area that manufactures various types of toothbrushes for domestic and international businesses. When he stopped by one of the companies to buy toothbrushes for the new hotel, instead of looking around the showroom of the company, he just sat down on the sofa because he felt tired. The company owner started to complain about Bryson’s behavior to the translator. Bryson asked what was wrong but the translator did not answer to avoid confrontation.

“And the gentleman who was either the owner or the sales manager started talking to the translator and the two of them started exchanging what I perceived to be excitable words, you know, words with intensity and emotion between them. I kept asking my guy, you know, what was going on, and he wouldn’t tell me, right? I got very upset, perhaps the ugly American, said, ‘Look, you know, I’m not here to play games with you.’”

Bryson’s example connected to UA in that his actions (e.g., sitting on the sofa instead of walking the showroom floor) were against the status quo of behavior. High index scores of UA are the result of strong codes of behavior and guidelines. By not following those cultural guidelines of behavior, Bryson defied the culture’s low tolerance for ambiguity.

Bryson went on to explain how the reserved attitude of the Chinese culture is applied to the hotel industry. He contrasted such demeanor with a more open attitude seen within the United States, particularly in the hotel industry.

“Americans are very casual, quick to make friends, quick to touch and hug, quick to love, quick to hate, and the Asians, they reserve judgment. They watch, they observe, and then decide, and it’s a very slow build to a relationship. And I think that’s easily reflected in hospitality.”

This difference between two cultures can reflect on not only business but also interaction among people. Bryson’s explanation of the Asian culture taking a more methodical approach to building relationships through reserved judgement, observation, and slow acceptance of a relationship applies to UA’s high index score of following a cultural status quo. In contrast, Bryson cited the U.S. as an example of a lower degree of UA because relationships are built more freely, quickly, and without perhaps greater understanding of the risks involved.

Characteristics of Chinese Managers

Bryson spoke about relatively stronger characteristics of Chinese businessmen related to the Toothbrush Town experience. The story about Toothbrush Town, as previously mentioned, was also related to sensitivity of a person’s attitude.

“He (company employee) was criticizing me and said that he didn’t believe I was who I said I was, and didn’t believe that I represented what I said I represented, because I came in and sat down, as opposed to coming in and walking around the room and looking at their product line.”

Bryson provided another story from a Western-oriented hotel in Beijing. Bryson had a stroke that affected his handwriting, and his signature on a traveler’s check was different from the one in his passport. Managers at the front desk did not believe the participant and he signed 10 times and explained he had a stroke that affected his activities of daily living. “And this happened this first day, but it happened every single time at that hotel, until they would call the manager and I had like 18 signatures on one traveler’s check.” Bryson used this story to

explain how his experiences in Western cultures were characterized by quicker to trust individuals and how the Asian hospitality was affected by such a cultural tendency to mistrust.

Management Philosophies

Management philosophies have been adopted from the study of Baird et al. (1990) measuring cultural difference. The philosophies also have been validated in differentiating cultural difference between China and the United States in the hotel industry (Choi, Stahura, Sammons, & Bernhard, 2013). In this study, empowerment, educating customers, and difference of personal management philosophies provided a landscape for an American (or Western) expatriate's basic understanding for management philosophies and how the understanding can be different from Chinese (or Asian) cultural perspectives.

Empowerment. Bryson provided his insight about the concept of employee empowerment.

“One of the things you’re talking about is employee empowerment. Are these employees conditioned to believe that their first job is to comply with the rules and regulations of the organization, or to comply with the spirit of the mission of the organization, which is to provide service to employees—provide service to guests, to charge them money and make a profit? My guess, absent of any other input, would be that they’ve been conditioned to follow the rules. That’s the way they were trained.”

This comment explains the relative cultural differences of values between China and the United States in terms of what employees are “conditioned to believe”. Trompenaars (1985) pointed out some of the distinctive cultural characteristics of the United States as an individualistic focus on the self, where conditions may be altered due to situational circumstances. Conversely, in Chinese culture relatively close to collectivism, employees are conditioned to be loyal to the organization or oftentimes to the owner(s). This cultural setting

can lead the employees “conditioned to believe” in “the rules” over the “spirit of the mission of the organization”.

Educating customers. One of the researchers told a story during the interview about an experience when visiting a hotel in Chicago. The researcher went back to the hotel late at night but did not know to use the key card when trying to get into the property after 10 p.m. The researcher knocked on the front door and the staff at the front desk made a face and yelled, “Don’t you have any idea that you have to use your key card if you want to get in after 10!” After hearing this story, Bryson gave a different perspective about this story by mentioning educating customers.

“I think, OK, where does the responsibility lie in the service management process for educating the customer, right? You need to have an educated customer. You have to educate them. Like, you know, like we go Southwest Airlines. How do we know, unless we’re told somehow, that I get a number and that means I board in groups? How do we educate our customers?”

This is the very similar approach to “empowerment”. Bryson provided a solution for the conflict between the customer and employee by suggesting customer education may be greater when an “spirit of the mission” approach is taken rather than a rule-specific approach. For example, the hotel’s front desk clerk may use an opportunity to educate a patron about using a card after a specific hours rather than yelling because of a specific rule. Additionally, an airline may educate customers about boarding in zones with a simple line on the ticket or by mentioning it when tickets are distributed rather than assuming the rule is understood or by permitting flexibility when the rule is ignored.

Differences in management philosophies. Bryson talked about the differences of management philosophies between China and the United States by describing participative Bali managers.

“Well, I would say their (Chinese) management philosophies were not very participative. I had a very good opportunity to speak for a couple of days to a group of employees at a hotel in Nusa Dua in Bali, the Southern part of Bali, the most upscale part of Bali. So when I got there to talk, what I found was something very different than I thought I would find. I found a more participative, mentoring management style than I thought I would have. But that’s because most of these individuals attending this seminar were in school and had a mentor or someone who was working in the industry that looked after them, you know, that was like their supervisor or their buddy.”

This comment can be related to relatively “universalist” Western culture suggested by Trompenaars (1985). Especially in Chinese culture, *guanxi* (meaning relationship) oftentimes means more than just a relationship because it facilitates business networks in an influential manner. Thus, Bryson expected a management philosophy in Bali that embraced elements of high UA measures and adhered to the cultural status quo. However, the mentoring relationships noted by Bryson revealed a more Western approach to management that held low UA measures.

Participant Interpretation

The researchers combined several different comments on what Bryson described about his experiences from the perspective of affective and cognitive reasoning about cultural differences in the hotel industry between the United States and China.

Affective reasoning. Following are responses regarding affective reasoning.

- Perception in handling complaints:

“Maybe, you know, if I went and complained and said, ‘this person was completely rude to me,’ in this country they might get disciplined, or even fired. Out there, I doubt it. As a matter of fact, I thought the managers were as rude to me as the

employees were, whereas in this country, if an employee is rude to you, you ask to see the manager, and the manager at least knows well enough not to behave rudely while you're telling him that one of your staff is rude."

- Perception as a guest in Chinese hotels:

"Yeah, an intruder, yeah, an interrupter, that's a good way of putting it. And I'm not saying everyone made me feel that way, but whenever I dealt with the hotel front desk, at any place I stayed, be it about rooms, meals, or anything else, I always felt like I was intruding, that I was asking for something that they couldn't answer or they couldn't handle, that they didn't really want to give me customer service. They wanted to give me generic service that they gave to everybody else. And you know, see, I'm a seasoned traveler, so I don't want generic service. I don't think anyone was ever being rude to me. I simply think they weren't being as warm to me as I would have expected in almost any other society that I had visited."

Cognitive reasoning. Following are responses regarding cognitive reasoning.

- Reasoning from society and history:

"I want to be careful in what I say because we're talking about one man's perceptions, all right, even if I'm a man who believes that he understands service from a multicultural perspective. I really feel like Chinese, because their culture perhaps has been closed off to the rest of the world for so long, are not well prepared to embrace disparate forms of hospitality, and that that will hurt them in developing tourist economies because after all, you know, word of mouth is very powerful and after a few people go and post a blog and spread it around that, you know what, China wasn't, you know, the place for you, that you couldn't really luxuriate. I'm not saying the Chinese are not hospitable, or they don't know how to be, but again I

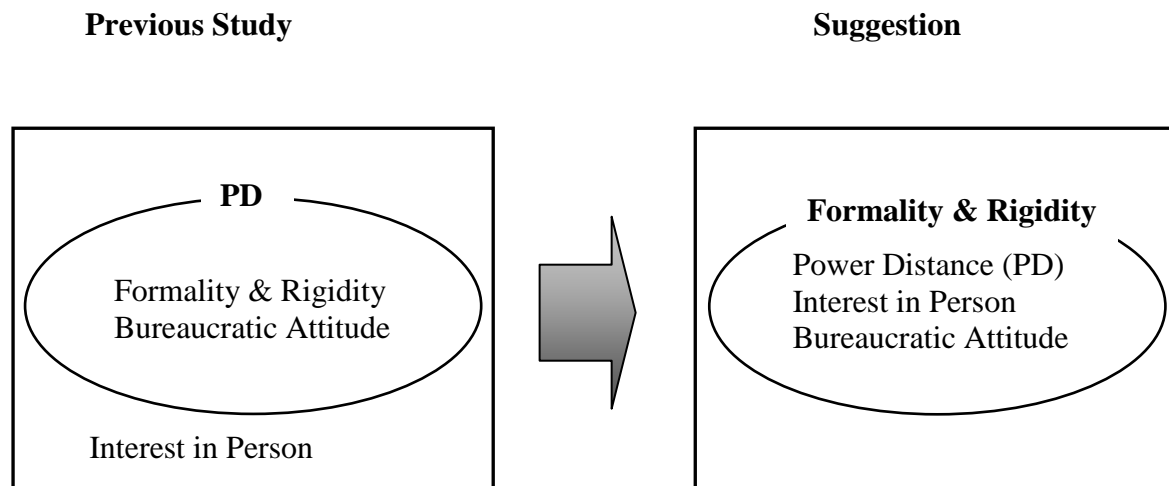
blame the political, bureaucratic history of China, you know, large communist, lot of paperwork, a lot of rules and regulations, that when I go to China, unlike anywhere else I've ever traveled, I feel like all I'm being told is that here are the ways that we deliver service, and you must take them."

Discussion and Implications

There are a couple of findings in PD. First, even though previous studies showed that Chinese are more concerned about PD than people in Western countries, they actually care about "who the person is". It is assumed that they indirectly judge whether to respect the company by its employee. The other important finding for PD is about "formality and rigidity". Even though Bryson mentioned the core concept of PD, he named it as formality and rigidity, which could be a broader term to explain PD. Since the concept PD is the perception wholly based on the relationship between bosses and subordinates, a subordinate can be relatively more concerned about the rules, regulations, and norms than efficiency, reason, and achievement. Thus, for example, an employee with higher perception of power distance is more inclined to be formal and rigid in doing business.

These findings can lead to suggestions of inclusive concepts for a couple of cultural dimensions. First, the new finding is different from the concept of PD developed by Hofstede (1980). Thus, there should be an inclusive concept term encompassing PD so that the attitude of Chinese caring about "who the person is" could be explained while "respect or obligation for authority" could be included in the new concept. Considering the findings in this study, formality and rigidity instead of PD could be a broader concept covering PD and other related characteristics (*i.e.*, bureaucratic attitude). Also, it could explain "why they want to know who the person is" from formality and rigidity (*i.e.*, Chinese think getting to know about the person is a formal way of doing business). See Figure 1 for a more detailed visual.

Figure 1



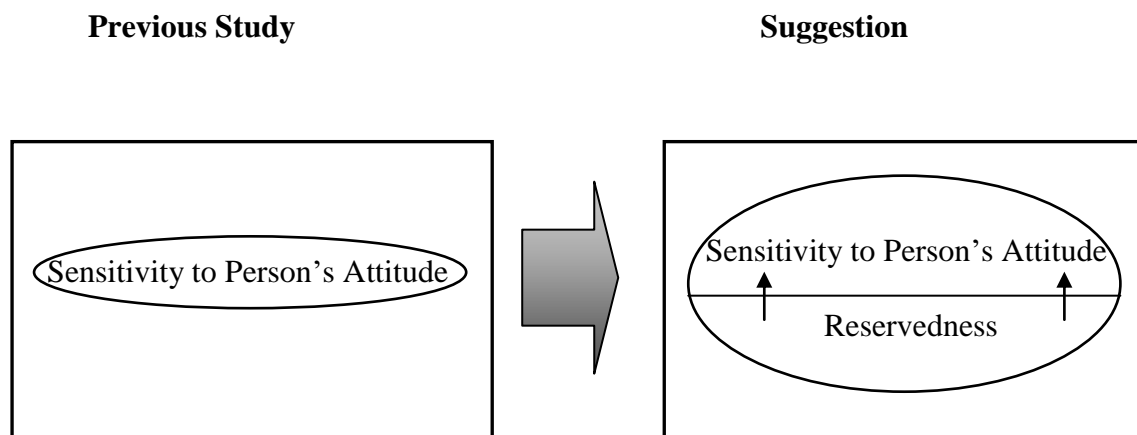
The findings referring to the Chinese culture that is reserved and avoids confrontation in UA were similar with previous studies. The researchers utilized the concept of uncertainty avoidance as one of the categories in data analysis. Among the characteristics mentioned by Blank and Slipp (1994) of Asians, the researchers constructed reservedness and avoiding confrontation as parts of UA. Reservedness was included into UA because it is related to avoiding spontaneous decision making. Also, avoiding confrontation can be a part of UA because Chinese avoid confrontation itself rather than trying to avoid the result of confrontation.

The findings in UA could have practical implications for the hotel industry especially for managing and training employees. For training, for example, better than conducting aggressive employee training as usually done in the U.S., a bit more patience and a sincere attitude in training an employee with Chinese cultural background would be more effective and successful. It also could be applied in managing and dealing with employees with Chinese culture background. For example, managers should not be mistaken that Chinese employees are doing fine because they do not bring up issues or complaints to managers.

The interesting finding in characteristics of Chinese managers could be sensitivity to a person's attitude. The long-held Confucius ethics and moral could affect the sensitivity. Confucius ethics and morality emphasize attitude more than Western society.

The finding of sensitivity to a person's attitude could be related to reservedness. We can ask questions like "Then why don't they react to the person's attitude even if they're relatively more sensitive to it?" Even though Chinese might be sensitive to a person's attitude, because of the reserved attitude, they would not show spontaneous reaction about the person's attitude as someone in the United States would. In other words, the reserved attitude could be an underlying factor affecting effects of sensitivity to a person's attitude. Previous studies separate and analyze these two factors. However, the relationship of these two should be studied. See Figure 2 for greater detail.

Figure 2



The researchers suggest a different perspective about Bryson's comments on educating customers. In management philosophies, Bryson mentioned empowerment and educating customers. The researchers agree with Bryson's idea that empowerment needs to be further developed in China, especially considering our own expertise. Higher levels of empowerment could lead to flexibility of the organization and consequently business success. However, when it comes to educating customers, customers get to know about, for example, how they order at restaurants, what to do when they stop at business facilities, or when to

board an airplane. It is possible that people from different cultures are not well aware of those cultural norms and rules within a given country. Simply, Chinese tourists visiting Las Vegas as a tourist destination might not be aware of having eye contact when talking to each other or be confused when a waiter asks them, “How do you like your eggs?” So, if employees in the hotel, for example, are well trained about how to “educate” or emphasize tourists from different countries, this would be a way for enhancing effective customer service.

Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study is the sample. While Soafer (2002) argues that key informant interviews are critical to exploratory research, it must be noted that this study’s findings are one expatriate’s perspective and should be approached with a critical examination. It is acknowledged that even one negative experience by this single participant can very well skew the data and result in a participant “airing out” about the negative perception received. Still, one person’s perspective gives greater insight than existed before on enhancing diversity in the U.S. hotel industry workforce.

In addition to exploring cultural experiences by including more participants, future research in this area can be focused on developing theoretical approach and examining the findings of empirical research. First, since the findings in this study are based on some of the critical theories and empirical applications, improvement of the existing theories can be possible. Especially, the new proposition in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance can lead to modification of the cultural dimensions compatible with current cultural evolution since the theory was introduced three decades ago. Second, based on new findings in the current study, an empirical tool measuring cultural difference can be developed and examined to see if the tool explains cultural differences. Since the current study has adopted cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 2001) and management philosophies

(Baird et al., 1990) from previous research, revision and re-examination of the existing empirical tools would be beneficial matching up with the current cultural differences.

Implications

The current study can be beneficial for researchers and practitioners. For researchers, this study would be a chance to extrapolate different aspects of theories of cultural differences. Culture evolves and research attempts to explain the evolution. Hofstede (2001) pointed out that most of the cultural dimensions he suggested were based on theories of Western academia. Explaining different cultures with mostly theories from Western culture can be myopic or has a limitation. The researchers hope this study presents an alternative to prior examinations using a Western theoretical paradigm.

For practitioners, this study can provide practical guidelines for accessing Chinese culture and people at critical moments of truth in service provision. Simply being aware of cultural differences can make a substantial difference between customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Some possible cultural norms or misunderstandings are that people from some Asian cultures including China are not accustomed to holding the door for the person coming after; some tourists visiting the United States might not be aware of how to order and eat at restaurants; proper introduction is required for the first business meeting in China; and hugging is not common in China compared to the United States. These misunderstandings can be critical information for practitioners in the hospitality industry who are employing a diverse workforce and are serving customers from different cultural backgrounds.

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