

Asian hospitality: Crisis of dilution in Asian-ness

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Objectives | In recent decades, Asian hospitality firms have been doing remarkably well in terms of their quality services and international presence (Wan & Chon, 2010). From a chronological point of view, the education and skill development in the hospitality field was first rooted in Europe; then a paradigm shift of hospitality has emerged initially from Europe to North America, and now from North America to Asia – making the current phenomenon the “Asian paradigm” or “Asian-ness” in hospitality (Chon, 2013). The advent of the Asian paradigm is probably the result of Asia’s strong economic growth, wider acceptance of Asian popular culture (Otmazgin, 2011) and richness in traditional culture and rituals. There is no doubt that Asian hospitality is in the spotlight, being an “emerging concept” (Wan & Chon, 2010) for both the academics and business practitioners.

Hospitality is well recognized as a new and multi-disciplinary field for study (O’Gorman, 2007). Most concepts and theories are developed in western countries. Asian hospitality management is emerging and it is not without problems. The intrinsic spirit of Asian hospitality is caring and serving people, deep from one’s heart (Wan & Chon, 2010). It is always people, the human capital. From the author’s observations and interpretations, some Asian characteristics are in the crisis of fading or dilution, especially in the newer generation, i.e. the generation Y or post-1990s’ generation, which was born in the same era when the Internet has started to boom. The people in that generation are mostly tech-savvy, possessing strong skills in Internet searching and remaining active in virtual life. As a result, their interpersonal communications skills may not be as good as that of those from the previous generations (Lolli, 2013). In contrast to the western people, Asians are more collectivistic due to their larger power distance social culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 1991). Power distance refers to the extent a country or place “accepts unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations” (Tsang & Ap, 2007). Collectivistic characteristics are a key asset to hospitality service because they are more likely to achieve a sincerer and bigger smile (Sucher, Pusiran, Dhevabanchachai, & Chon, 2013). In Asian socio-culture, guests are viewed as superior, and people who serve guests are expected to show respect and humility. This may be explained by relatively high power distance cultures – notably found in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and most other Asian countries, where people generally accept inequality in social hierarchy (Hofstede, 1980; Tsang & Ap, 2007). In observing this, the paper identifies the essence of being “Asian-ness”, and looks into the possibility of “Asian-ness” dilution in hospitality.

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This study outlines a few contemporary issues that may possibly cause such the dilution in the good aspects of Asian-ness.

Methodology | Qualitative approach was adopted through in-depth interviews. The interviewee candidates were meant to be educators, who preferably had hands-on experience in serving customers in tourism and/or hotel industry. In order to obtain fruitful and in-depth opinions, at least 60 minutes was allocated for each interview, either by telephone or face-to-face. Open-ended questions were asked, and the ice-breaking question was “Have you heard anything about ‘Asian-ness’ in hospitality management?”. Interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014 so that experts’ opinions on this matter could be reflected. Content analysis was performed so that the manuscripts of the two interviews were carefully studied.

Main Results and Contributions | The preliminary findings of two key interviews are reported due to their relevance and contribution to this research topic. The author invited Mrs Ló, a mother of two daughters (aged 11 and 8), a veteran teacher of a convent school in Macau, for a 60-minute telephone interview. The author also invited Mr Yam (a pseudonym), a father and an experienced educator, who is knowledgeable in hotel management, to share, through a 60-minute face-to-face interview, his perceptions on “Asian-ness” and the possible dilution in it. The summary and explanations are illustrated in Table 1, in which the author, through in-depth interviews, suggests the reasons behind the cause of such dilution in “Asian-ness”. The crisis of dilution in “Asian-ness” may not have an instant weakening impact on *Point 5 personalized care* and *Point 9 exceeding customers’ expectation* because it is believed that adequate training in customer services and sophisticated computer technologies can help maintain the service level.

Table 1 | Summary of identified weakening aspects in Asian hospitality

	“Asian-ness” in Hospitality	Possible dilution in “Asian-ness”
1.	Sincerity	Sign of weakening
2.	Serving from the heart: smile and humility	Sign of weakening
3.	Craftsmanship in hand-making goods	Sign of weakening
4.	Great attentiveness	Sign of weakening
5.	Personalized care	Maintaining
6.	Courteousness and respect	Sign of weakening
7.	Proud of the organization (in-group)	Sign of weakening
8.	Embedded with history and culture	Sign of weakening
9.	Exceeding customers’ expectation	Maintaining
10.	Strong sense of entrepreneurship	Sign of weakening

* Sign of weakening indicates that the level of “Asian-ness” is not as high as that of the previous generation.

Limitations | This study attempts to explain the phenomenon of dilution in “Asian-ness”, and it is only conducted in Macau. This study does not include geographic areas beyond Macau or interviewees other than the ethnic Chinese group. This study only includes the views from educators: an instructor and a vice-principal.

Conclusions | This paper attempts to characterize “Asian-ness” in hospitality management. It lays some foundation for future studies or researches. Since Asian hospitality or Asian paradigm is an emerging concept (Wan & Chon, 2010), this paper takes the words from seasoned hospitality practitioners as first-handed information. As mentioned, some aspects of “Asian-ness” in hospitality may face gradual dilution due to various reasons. Whether our future generation, i.e. post-1990s or generation Z and millennial, in Asia can sustain and keep Asian paradigm moving and growing has uncertainty, and it is certainly a big topic to be explored. Every identified weakening aspect of “Asian-ness” in Asian hospitality (see Table 1) can be addressed qualitatively in future researches. Furthermore, future studies may also include the views from employers and managers in the hospitality industry.

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