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Chinese Culture and Casino Customer Service

by

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ABSTRACT

Chinese Culture and Casino Customer Service

by

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With the tightened competitive conditions in the gaming industry, it is essential for casino management to focus on customer service. Chinese customers are very important for the Las Vegas gaming market. Even though the games offered by the casinos are the core value that Chinese customers seek when visiting a casino, a warm, comfortable and intimate service will enhance their gaming experience as well. Understanding important Chinese culture factors such as superstitions, gaming characteristics and communication styles can help casino employees enhance the quality of the service they are able to offer to Chinese customers, thereby increasing satisfaction and retention.

PART ONE

Introduction

The hospitality industry is all about customer service. While many factors might influence a player's decision to play in and return to the same casino, customer service definitely plays an important role in the player's re-visit decision-making process.

Chinese gamblers are well known for playing longer and betting bigger than other demographic groups (Dumlao & Farrell, 1998). Indeed, a large number of high rollers in Las Vegas are Chinese or have Chinese ancestry. About 80 percent of Las Vegas' biggest whales are from Asia, most of them baccarat players from China and Hong Kong (Rivlin, 2007).

The potential of Chinese customers is already widely recognized in the gaming industry. Understanding how Chinese cultural factors can affect the needs and expectations of visitors will lead to an increase in the quality of customer service, and therefore to an increase in customer satisfaction and retention rates as well.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to determine what cultural considerations need to be observed by casino operators in order to enhance their casino customer service toward Chinese gamblers.

Justification

Due to the financial importance of Chinese casino players, the findings of this research will have important implications for casino operators in Las Vegas. It has been reported that due to the large amount of Chinese players' visit, Chinese New Year is now the second-biggest gambling holiday of the year in Las Vegas, after only Super Bowl weekend (Benston, 2007). China's large population and high level of interest in gambling activities, along with increasingly

simplified international travel policies, have made China a very attractive target market for Las Vegas (Kim et al., 2004). Based on estimates from the United Nations, the Chinese are destined to become the dominant foreign tourists in Las Vegas, surpassing the number of visitors from any other country (Benston, 2008). Many major casinos in Las Vegas are already making an effort to appeal to Chinese guests, including redesigning large portions of a casino floors to cater to their tastes. Some Las Vegas casinos already have representatives in China to attract more Chinese players, and Chinese-speaking dealers and servers are not rare on the casino floors, especially in the high limit baccarat salons. However, with the competition from Asia such as Singapore and Macau, which surpassed Las Vegas's gaming revenue in 2007 (Cheung, 2007), and the domestic economic downturn, all these efforts will only be worthwhile if the team is fully prepared to properly serve these customers when they arrive at the casinos. Therefore, if a Las Vegas casino intends to maintain and increase its market share of Chinese players, it is necessary to thoroughly understand those Chinese players' culture, needs, and expectations, as well as how to use these factors to enhance the level of customer service provided.

PART TWO

Introduction

The literature review included a brief history of Chinese gambling and the impact of the Chinese on Las Vegas, as well as Chinese culture, Chinese gambling characteristics, Chinese communication styles, and casino customer service.

The Chinese and Gambling

The Chinese are known worldwide for their high interest in gambling activities, and a quick look through Chinese history shows that the Chinese people have a long documented history of gambling. The first record of gambling can be traced back to the Xie dynasty and the Shang dynasty, about 4,000 years ago (Lam, 2009). The oldest form of gambling game in China is the Keno, similar to the modern day lottery. China's first modern casino emerged in the Shanghai International Settlement and Shanghai French Concession. Many popular games such as Pai gow, fan tan and mahjong that are now played worldwide are believed to have originated in China (Godot, 2010; Glionna, 2006; Lam, 2009).

Despite this long history, there have also been times when public commercial gambling has been banned by authorities that recognized the damage that of pathological gambling could cause to the society, but shortly after, it was legalized again, due to the financial importance of gambling to the economy. Even in 1949, when the newly established government of the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) completely ended commercial gambling in Mainland China (Devoss, 2009; Lam, 2009), a state-run lottery system was established about 20 years later, generating billions of dollars every year to fund government organizations ("Mainland China," 2008).

The Chinese traditionally enjoy and cherish gambling as a social activity. For a long time, regardless of the official attitude of the government towards commercial gambling, the majority

of Chinese considered gambling an accepted practice at home and a social event, even among the young, that brings people together for excitement and interaction (Bjorkell, 2008; Glionna, 2006). Games like Mahjong, deeply ingrained in the Chinese, that people play with their family and friends, often for money, can be found played in every corner of China is not considered gambling (Latour, Sarrazit & Hendler, 2009).

In 1999, after almost 450 years of colonial administration in Macau, Portugal handed the administration of Macau back to the Chinese, making Macau the only entity on the Chinese mainland where gambling is legal (Portal do Governo da RAE de Macau, 2004). In 2002, the new Macau government ended Stanley Ho's 40-year monopoly concession; five outside gaming licenses, three from America, were granted to build competing resorts and casinos. Along with the growing Chinese economy and the P.R.C government's eased entry for the Chinese to Macau, in 2006 Macau surpassed Las Vegas in gambling revenue as the biggest gaming city in the world (Cheung, 2007; Devoss, 2006; Smock, 2006). "It took 50 years to build Las Vegas, and this little enclave surpassed it in four," said Philip Wang, MGM'S president for International Marketing (Devoss, 2006).

It's hard to put an exact number on the tremendous amount of money contributed by the Chinese every year to the gambling industry around the world. According to the China Center for Lottery Studies at Beijing University, an estimated more than 600 billion yuan-- about 87.84 billion USD-- in gambling money goes overseas from China every year (Qian & Zhang, 2010). Many countries near the Chinese border, such as Myanmar and Vietnam, are building large-scale casinos to attract Chinese gamblers to spend their money, while forbidding the locals to enter. In Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Cambodia, Chinese gamblers are the major overseas visitors for their casinos. A spokesperson from Marina Bay Sands told China

Daliy, “With its growing middle class population, China is an attractive market for us. We consciously cater to the needs of Chinese guests, from the way they like to be greeted to the way they like their food served” (Yip, 2010, p. 1). The Chinese reputation for being gambling enthusiasts is growing all over the world.

The Chinese and Las Vegas

Because of many Chinese gambling movies and TV dramas, in which Las Vegas was frequently featured as the final destination, the paradise and the ultimate city of gambling; Las Vegas is very well known among the Chinese. However, the relationship between the Chinese and Nevada actually can be dated back to the early 1860s, when Chinese immigrants made up two-thirds of the workforce that built the Pacific Central Railroad, which helped to connect Nevada to the rest of the country (Demirjian, 2011; Doolittle, 2009). Now, 150 years later, Chinese people still play a very important role in the Las Vegas economy. For decades, the city has gone all out to celebrate Chinese New Year, the most important holiday of the Chinese. The holiday ranks among the busiest times on the Strip, after only the Super Bowl weekend, bringing thousands of domestic and international tourists to Las Vegas and generating millions of dollars in the city’s economy, particularly in gaming. The celebration of the holiday attracts higher-end customers from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, who spend more than the average tourist, especially on the casino floor games like baccarat (Benston, 2007; Finnegan, 2011b). That’s why while properties like Caesars Palace has celebrated the Chinese New Year for more than 35 years, newer properties like the M Resort have started to celebrate the holiday as well (Finnegan, 2011a).

Two decades ago, when Baccarat was first played in Las Vegas, there were few tables to choose from. During the 1970s, there were reportedly only 15 tables in all of Las Vegas, and

most of these tables were open only part time, during busy shifts (Whiting, 2010). Today, it is easy to spot a baccarat table in casinos throughout Las Vegas, and even the smaller-scale local casinos are offering mini baccarat (Oberman & Pirosh, 2010). This is significant because baccarat is extremely popular in China, and is the favorite game of high rolling Chinese tourists in Las Vegas. Baccarat players wagered \$10.7 billion in 2010 on the Strip, a 24% increase from 2009, making baccarat the only Nevada game that is growing despite the economic downturn (Benston, 2010b; Benston, 2011a). Its revenue has grown by \$280 million since 2007. In March 2010, on a same-store basis, while the total gaming revenue declined by 8.0%, baccarat and mini baccarat revenues were up 57.2%, peaking at \$1.2 billion. For the first time last year, baccarat generated more revenue than blackjack, the most-played table game in Nevada casinos (Benston, 2011b; Oberman & Pirosh, 2010).

With the increased recognition of the importance of Chinese customers and their preferences, several changes have been made in recent years. The MGM Grand changed their main lion mouth entrance only a few years after building it in order to avoid a Chinese bad luck symbol. Other properties have redesigned a large portion of casino floors, adding Chinese furniture (Rivlin, 2007). Caesars Entertainments imported carved wood from China to house hundreds of baccarat tables and Pai Gow poker, which is based on ancient Chinese dominoes games. In the Encore Las Vegas, red is the dominant color on the casino floor. Butterfly patterns are everywhere, and the floor numbers in the elevator panel from 40 to 49 are missing as a concession to Chinese superstition.

Gambling Across Cultures

According to Per Binde's (2005) study of gambling across cultures, extensive ethnographic and historical evidence strongly suggests that gambling is not an universal

phenomenon and does not exist in all cultures in a similar way. Gambling is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, an extremely flexible way of redistributing wealth, which is embedded in the socio-cultural systems of societies. Factors like the presence of commercial money, societal complexity, type of social and economic system, risk and uncertainty, religion and belief systems, cultural diffusion and contiguous areas of gambling and non-gambling can promote or restrain gambling activities.

Types of social and economic systems play a remarkable role in explaining why people gamble. Friedman's savage utility function explains that people wish to use the cost of, for example, a lottery ticket to win the extra money to help them move to a higher social class. However, others have argued that Friedman's savage theory ignores the utility value of gambling itself, such as the excitement of winning and risking, entertainment, buying a dream of wealth and prosperity, and showing possession of wealth (Binde, 2005).

Lenski (1970) argued that an environment in which there exists a high degree of uncertainty would imply a higher probability of the appearance of games of chance; but Pryor (1976) argues that many cultural groups, such as the Australian Aborigines, have little control over the environment they live in, but no games of chance exist in their culture. Hardness of environment has no correlation with gambling. It is suggested that, theoretically, gambling is encouraged in societies in which people's individual risk taking behavior is culturally construed as a positive characteristic (Binde, 2005).

Gambling and religion are often believed to be opposed; however, that is not the case, because the relationship between gambling and religion is either a state of concord or of conflict. However, most of the time, gambling and religion go well together because there are several factors, such as mystery, fate, the unknown, destiny, getting something valuable from mysterious

higher powers, and the wish for a better life. In some societies with religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, it is more likely the societies will outlaw gambling; however, history shows that criticism and prohibition does not necessarily stop people from gambling. Gambling has often continued underground (Binde, 2003; Binde, 2005).

Townshend (1980) suggested that the complexity of a society is closely related to the presence of the types of games and the games of strategy. It is believed that the more complex a society, the more the types of games and games of strategy are present (Binde, 2005).

It is also believed that societies with indigenous gambling appear to be a cluster geographically (Binde, 2005). Tylor (1880) also suggested that people from different regions but who have cultural contacts will tend to like to play similar games (Binde 2005).

Chinese Superstition Culture

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, superstition is “unreasoning awe or fear of something unknown, mysterious, or imaginary, especially in connection with religion.” The Chinese tend to be superstitious, and many of these superstitious beliefs have existed for thousands of years. Common superstitions associate colors, numbers, animals and objects with good or bad luck. Studies about superstitions and how superstitions can influence people’s behavior show that traditional Western superstitious beliefs do not apply to the Chinese. The ideas and values in different cultures may result in superstitions that take different forms and have different influences on people’s lives (Li & Ching, 2009; Ouedraogo & Mullet, 2001).

In the study done by Li & Ching (2009) of Chinese superstitious belief scale, six dimensions: homonym traditional customs, power of crystal, horoscope, feng-shui, and luck for gambling, were rated, along with 25 superstitious thoughts, none of which were cross-loaded on another. The results show that all six factors’ values of Cronbach α were above .75. This strongly

supported the idea that many Chinese superstitions affect the daily lives of Chinese people in various ways. Below is a brief introduction to the common superstition practices among the Chinese.

Feng-shui

Feng-shui literally means wind (feng) and water (shui). It refers to the ancient Chinese art of creating harmony between inhabitants and their environment (Tsang, 2004). Feng-shui has gone global in the business world as many Western companies have employed feng-shui expert as consultants (Li & Ching, 2009; Tsang, 2004). For Chinese people, it is believed that the position of a building and the interior design and arrangement of furniture can influence what happens to the people inside the building. It studies the influence of environment on human fortune. The purpose of feng-shui is to improve good environmental influences of a living space on its occupants and to avoid the bad ones (Tsang, 2004). As mentioned earlier, MGM changed its lion mouth entry because walking through a lion's mouth is considered bad feng-shui, and will bring people bad luck. Most Asian visitors were reluctant to enter; and soon the lion was replaced with a more traditional entrance.

Homonyms

Numerical homonyms. Unlike Western cultures, which believe in lucky 7 and unlucky 13, in traditional Chinese superstition the numerical digits 8 and 6 are associated with prosperity and good luck and the digit 4 is associated with death and unlucky. The pronunciation of the word for 8 in Chinese is “ba,” which very close to the pronunciation of the word “fa”(meaning prosperity), and the number 6 symbolizes smoothness of an event and success in Chinese. However, the number 4 has a similar pronunciation to the word “si” (meaning death), and is unlucky. These beliefs affect the decision of many Chinese people when they choose a telephone

number, a license plate, or the floor on which to buy an apartment. Even in the business world, these beliefs affect the decision when pricing products and avoiding bad digits when numbering the floors and rooms of apartment buildings (Li & Ching, 2009; Simmons & Schindler, 2003). This explains why, in Encore Las Vegas, the floor numbers from 40 to 49 are missing.

Word homonyms. In Chinese superstition culture, many Chinese words symbolize good or bad luck. For example, during the Chinese New Year, people eat fish to represent the Chinese saying of “nian nian you yu” meaning that you will have more than you need it in the coming year, because the pronunciation of fish (“yu”) means extra in Chinese. And one should never give a clock as gift to someone, because in Chinese clock is pronounced “zhong,” giving the word for clock a pronunciation similar to that of “song zhong,” meaning handling the funeral affairs of seniors, which is an unlucky term for people still alive. Some people who buy lottery tickets eat “zongzi,” because “zong” sounds like the word for “win.” These superstition beliefs are all generated from homonyms between Chinese (Mandarin) words, and people are very careful when using the specific homonyms to pursue good luck or avoid bad luck (Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler, & Latour, 2009; Li & Ching, 2009).

Traditional customs

Some practices in Chinese culture are considered to represent good luck and bad luck as well. For example, people worry about bad luck and put a mirror at the front door to reflect bad luck away. It's also said that a bed should never face a mirror (Simmons & Schindler, 2003). Houses should be completely clean before Chinese New Year's Day and on the Chinese New Year's Eve, all brooms, brushes, dusters, dust pans and other cleaning equipment need to be put away. Sweeping or dusting should not be done on New Year's Day for fear that good fortune will be swept away. The color red color represents luck and fortune; during Chinese New Year,

wearing red cloth and decorating living space with red will bring happiness and fortune to the coming new year (Li & Ching, 2009).

Luck in gambling

Similarly, gambling luck is associated with specific practices in Chinese superstition culture. As the chance of winning in gambling can't be controlled physically, Chinese gamblers look to the metaphysical solution promised by many of their superstitious beliefs. Even though not all who practice them necessarily believe in them, they are nonetheless accepted either because of mere superstition or as a cultural tradition.

Many gamblers believe that picking the right numbers can affect their fortune when gambling. For example, they purposely avoid hotel room numbers ending with 4 (sounds similar to death in Mandarin) and 58 (sounds similar to "won't prosper"). Instead, gamblers select auspicious hotel room numbers like 84 (similar to "prosperous till death"), 1388 (similar to "prosper for a long time"), 168 (similar to "prosper all the way") and 998 ("prosper for a long time"). However, picking the wrong number or combination of numbers can be a source of misfortune and very unlucky. For example, if a gambler takes a bus with the license plate of 1358 (similar to "won't prosper in one's lifetime") or carrying cash in the amount of 9958 (similar to "won't prosper for a long time") can be a reason to blame when they lose money in the casino (Lam, 2005).

Not only numbers, but certain words are considered unlucky to say to someone before they go to gamble or during any gambling event. For example, book (sounds like "lose" in Chinese) or read book (sounds similar to "lose in gambling") are words that need to be avoided for many superstitious Chinese gamblers. Many baccarat players shout out loud the word "ding" in Mandarin when peeling cards to stop bad cards from appearing. They also shout out other

words like “cheui” or “jin” in Cantonese to blow away the number they don’t want or reduce the size of the number(s) (Lam, 2007).

Chinese gamblers sometimes also preform ritual practices to get as much blessing and luck as they can from their gods, especially the fortune god. Offering fruits, lighting up a joss stick or making prayers are some of the practices they do before gamble (Lam, 2005). Wearing red underwear to gamble is a practice that is commonly believed to bring good luck to the gambler, since red represents good luck and happiness. Going to urinate or wash hands is believed to help change someone's luck who has been losing money, but one who has been winning should definitely not wash their hands, because it can wash the good luck away. Shoulder touching is inappropriate when someone is gambling, because it is believed to bring bad luck to the gambler (Galletti, 2002; Lam, 2005; Lam 2007).

Many Chinese gamblers also avoid entering casinos from the main gate as they believed it has been blessed by the Feng-shui expert to favor the casinos. Some gamblers are also very careful about which seat they choose to sit down at around the table, because they believe the Feng-shui of each seat is different which can seriously affect their luck. Also important to consider are which direction the table is facing, the surroundings of the tables (close to the entrance, next to the toilet, etc.) and the design and decoration of the casino (Galletti, 2002; Lam, 2005).

Gambling Characteristics of People from the Chinese Culture

Several studies on gambling motivation across cultures have indicated that compared with players from the Western culture, players from the Chinese culture have their own characteristics. It is believed that Chinese gamblers often take a higher risk compared with players from Western cultures (Ozorio & Fong, 2004; Raylu & Oei, 2004). Ozorio & Fong

(2004), using a Macau sample, found that the average bet-to-income ratio among the Mainland Chinese was 0.72, significantly higher than other groups of visitors even though the Mainland Chinese spend less money per gambling visit. The reason behind this is suggested to be that, because of China's emerging focus on capitalism and the economic booming, there is a positive relationship between gambling risk taking and investment risk taking. People participating in gambling believe that these risks are instrumental to the realization of profits to improve their living conditions in the shortest possible time (Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler, & Latour, 2009; Ozorio & Fong, 2004).

The Chinese take gambling seriously. When money is involved, there is less interest in the process of gambling but more concern with the result. This supported by the study done by Raylu & Oei (2009) about cross culture gambling motivations, which indicated that the Chinese group showed significantly higher levels of anxiety and stress than did the Caucasians, and lower levels of fun and excitement. Additionally, for most Chinese, the point of gambling is to use their mastery of the games to show off their gambling skills and gain monetary excitement (Lam, 2007; Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler & Latour, 2009; Ye, 2010).

Chinese gamblers also show a greater illusion of control as compared with players from Western cultures. This is most likely a result of the Chinese luck-oriented culture. They believe that certain practices during the gambling process, for example, sitting at tables which they believe to be lucky, comparing predictions and real outcomes to test their skills, and trying to peel cards to change gambling outcomes or get the number they want. Belief that gambling results can be predicted and controlled is common among the Chinese (Lam, 2007; Ye, 2010).

Chinese gamblers prefer intellectual and highly engaging games, games that can provide the players with social values, such as baccarat-- rather than individual games such as slot

machines (Lam, 2007; Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler & Latour, 2009). This behavior is believed to stem from a communal background that emphasizes social interaction and their culture's views of luck, fate and destiny. Even the few Chinese players who prefer slot machines like the ones based on chance rather than those that, like video poker, require some decision making (Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler, & Latour, 2009).

In sum, Chinese players tend to show a higher illusion of control (Raylu & Oei, 2004); more risk-orientation, influenced by Chinese luck-oriented thinking instead of probabilistic thinking (Keren, 1994; Ye, 2009); less need of emotional satisfaction in gaming; lower levels of pursuing fun and excitement, higher levels of avoidance of stress, anxiety, and depression; and less desire for learning and accomplishing (Chantal, Vallerand & Vallieres, 1995; Raylu & Oei, 2009; Ye, 2009).

Chinese Communication Style

China is a high-context communication style culture. A high-context culture communicates with implicit messages whose meaning can only be inferred from the context, and the receiver of the message reads between the lines (Fang & Faure, 2010; Galletti, 2002).

Research conducted by Gao and Ting-Tommey (1998) on Chinese communication has shown that there are five distinctive characteristics of Chinese communication: implicit communication (*hanxu*), listening-centered communication (*tinghua*), polite communication (*keqi*), insider-communication (*zijiren*), and face-directed communication (*mianzi*).

“*Hanxu*” means to contain and to save. It suggests an implicit and indirect Chinese communication style. To be *hanxu*, one does not spell out everything but leaves the unspoken to the listeners. “*Tinghua*” refers to a listening-centered communication style. To the Chinese, not everyone is entitled to speak, thus a spoken voice is equated with seniority, authority, age,

experience, knowledge, and expertise. “*Keqi*” generally means polite, courteous, modest, humble and well-mannered. The polite communication style is a basic communication principle in Chinese everyday communication. “*Zijiren*” means insider, as opposed to “wairen,” outsider; the Chinese tendency is to become highly involved in conversation with the insider, but rarely speak to strangers (outsiders). The insider effect suggests that the type of relationship determines what is communicated and how information should be transmitted. “*Minazi*” is the face or image of a person’s in-group moral reputation as well as his or her prestige. The Chinese relationship-oriented culture determines that face permeates every aspect of interpersonal relationship in Chinese communication (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Fang, & Faure, 2010).

However, China’s enormous economic development and direct contact with foreign technologies, cultures and lifestyles during the past three decades have significantly affected Chinese values, behaviors, and communication style. Nevertheless, neither the traditional Chinese cultural values nor communication characteristics have disappeared. Rather, both the traditional and new cultural values and communication characteristics are more and more visibly coexisting in today’s Chinese society.

Casino Customer Service

It is widely recognized that high quality of service and enhancing customer satisfaction are important factors in the success of companies in the hospitality industry (Barsky & Labagh 1992; Choi & Chu, 2001). Other studies also indicate that customer satisfaction and service quality are the two main factors of customer behavioral intention to recommend and repurchase (Choi & Chu, 2001; Getty & Thompson, 1994).

In the gambling industry, games offered by the casinos represent the core service that casino players seek (Brady & Cronin, 2001). However, it is hard for casino players to

differentiate between casinos at the same level, especially in a mature market like Las Vegas. The games and amenities offered by same-level casinos are similar. What one large casino has, all other large casinos have as well. For casinos to stand out and prosper in an environment of increased competition, they must provide a better guest experience (Baird, 2002). Apart from the games offered, all the other services, such as the service delivery provided by the employees and physical service environment, can work to enhance the service experience of customers in a casino (Wong & Fong, 2010).

In high-contact settings such as the service market, it is common that customers consider supplemental services, such as the physical service setting and the service delivery process, to be more important than the core service (Wong & Fong, 2010). Furthermore, these service-related elements also play an important role in allowing a firm to differentiate its value from others and provide a special position among their customers (Bitner, 1992).

Research suggests that the main reason for the Chinese to visit casinos is gambling (Fong & Ozorio, 2005). However, according to the study done by Wong & Fong (2010) examining service quality in Macau, while Chinese customers perceive the game service as the fundamental element to their gambling experience, comfort and hospitality are crucial as well. Thus, offering a variety of games is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for service satisfaction. Chinese casino customers regard a superior service environment as valuable, and intimate interpersonal interaction from the service they received could surpass their customer service expectations and thus, enhance their satisfaction level.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for casino management or staff to have little knowledge of their Chinese customers, for example, offering cocktail services during the peak of the games, expressing displeasure at some superstitious baccarat behaviors such as shouting

“ding” when peeling cards or rudely forbidding them to squeeze the cards (Lam, 2007). Despite the money to be made from Chinese high rollers, in Las Vegas, except for the Asian gaming pits and restaurants at several casinos and Asian inspired décor at Wynn Las Vegas and Encore, no public marketing effort has targeted the Chinese in recent years. There are no Chinese character signs at McCarran International Airport to welcome Chinese tourists, and no casinos have gone out of their way to hire Chinese-speaking hosts or other casino employees who can better converse with the Chinese (Benston, 2011a). The result of this lack of knowledge will only creates a negative image, reflect poor customer service, and show an absence of cultural sensitivity (Galletti, 2002; Lam, 2007).

Conclusion

The literature review shows us that financially, Chinese customers are extremely important to the Las Vegas gaming market. Chinese cultural factors such as superstitions, gambling characteristics and communication styles demonstrate that Chinese customers have different needs, expectations, and service requirements than those of the customers from Western cultures. In order to increase the satisfaction of Chinese guests and in turn, increase patronage among the Chinese customers, learning how to adjust the customer services offered by casinos to meet and or surpass their different needs, expectations and service requirements is the key.

Chinese Customers Information Sheet

The Chinese have a long and rich culture, and many cultural factors affect their daily lives. When it comes to gambling, the Chinese have their own distinctive characteristics and communication styles that are associated with their culture. Thus it might be difficult for casino staff who are not familiar with the Chinese culture to deliver superior casino customer service without first learning about some common Chinese cultural considerations and communication styles.

This small and easy to carry information sheet has been created to help casino staff acquire a better understanding of some common Chinese gaming culture considerations and communication styles in order to enhance the service quality offered and increase the customer satisfaction, and in turn, the retention, of Chinese customers.

While many common features of Chinese culture pertaining to gambling and communications are given here, this information sheet cannot possibly include all the Chinese cultural factors that are associated with gaming. Information should be added accordingly by staff members or management who deal with Chinese customers frequently.

Superstitions

Elements	Good Luck	Bad Luck
Color	Red, Yellow/Gold	White
Number Homonym	6,8,9	4,7
Number Combination Homonym	18-definitely prosper; 84-prosperous till death; 168-prosper all the way; 518- I will prosper; 988-prosper for a long time; 1388-prosperity in one's lifetime; 5189-I will prosper for a long time;	14- will die; 58-won't prosper; 958-won't prosper for a long time;1358-won't prosper in one's lifetime;
Words Homonym	<i>fa cai</i> -prosper; <i>gong xi fa cai</i> -hope you will prosper; yelling “ding” or “jin” when playing baccarat	<i>shu/si</i> (sounds like lose), <i>gan</i> (similar to lose it all)
Feng-shui	west side of a room; being able to see a door; avoiding the main entrance of a casino; room with plenty of sunlight; bamboo	sitting next to a door or window; fly swatter next to a casino cashier
Traditional Customs	don't urinate when on a wining streak; carrying or bring lucky items like: qi lin (imaginary animal), jade ring or sea salt; put coins under casino carpet; pray to the fortune god for blessing	being touched on the shoulder when gambling; gambling against a pregnant woman; males having sex before gambling; dropping chopsticks

- ❖ **Red** symbolizes good luck, good fortune, auspiciousness, happiness, and prosperity. Some players believe that wearing red cloth, especially red underwear, or having red accessories can bring you good luck. **Yellow** and **Gold** signifies neutrality and good luck. Yellow was the color of imperial China, and it holds the meaning of authority, power and nobility. **White** is the color of mourning. White is associated with death and is use predominately in funerals in Chinese culture (Galltie, 2002; Lam 2005).
- ❖ **Number Homonym:** 4 (similar to death) and 7 (signifyer of death) are bad and unlucky; 6, 8 and 9 are good and lucky; other numbers are less important. Two or more continuous numbers, such as 44, 74 or 444, are worse than a single unlucky number alone; similarly, two or more consecutive good numbers, such as 66, 88 or 888, are better than one lucky number alone (Yang, 2011).
- ❖ **Number Combinations Homonym:** Combinations of numbers, when similar to certain pronunciations of words or sentences, is also given specific meanings (Lam, 2005; Yang, 2011).
- ❖ **Words Homonym:** words like “shu” (Mandarin) or “si” (Cantonese) means a book is a homophone of “loss;” carrying or looking at a book (carrying or bringing loss) where people are taking risks such as gambling is considered to invite bad luck and loss (Huang & Teng, 2009).
- ❖ **Feng-shui:** it is believed that Chi, or positive energy, flows more intensely in some places than it does in others, and these spots where Chi influence is greater can be of strategic importance for a gambler's good luck. For example, the west side of a room and the spot where you can see a door have better chi, or energy flow, and thus are good spots for gamblers (Cheong, 2010).
- ❖ Some traditional customs in gambling might not make sense for people who are not from the Chinese culture, but they are commonly practiced among a lot Chinese players (Huang & Teng, 2009).

Casino Service Preferences

Items	The Chinese prefer	They are not a huge fan of
Games	baccarat, paigow (highly engaging, chance based games) etc.	slot machines (less engaging), poker (games that require decision making) etc.
Casino Environment	comfortable, easy to converse with players as well as the dealers; private (especially for high rollers)	smaller stakes, cocktails and party atmosphere
Accommodations	rooms /floors with lucky numbers; rooms facing north; rooms with good Feng-shui;	rooms that conflict with major Feng-shui rules; unlucky room /floor numbers
Food	easy to access, quick and comforting	long and big meal (while gambling)
Beverage	non-alcoholic drinks; for example, water, hot tea or juice	drinking alcohol (while gambling)

- ❖ **Games:** Baccarat is the Chinese people's favorite casino games, however, game like slot machines that are less engaging or require decision making are not very attractive to them (Lam, 2007); the communal background that highlights social interaction and their culture's views of luck, fate and destiny stimulate this behavior (Latour, Sarrazit, Hendler & Latour, 2009).
- ❖ **Casino Environment:** the Chinese play longer, have higher illusion of control and a perceived inability to stop gambling, and like to show off their gambling skills; they often practice certain behaviors like peeling cards slowly, showing other players their cards, discussing and predict each others chances of winning. Thus a comfortable, easy to communicate environment is preferable (Benston, 2011a; Lam, 2007 & Ye, 2010).
- ❖ **Accommodations:** number homonym and Feng-shui are important when assigning rooms for the Chinese; when losing occurred, these factors might be main sources of blame (Lam, 2005).
- ❖ **Food:** The Chinese can play games continuously for a long time. While enjoying good food is a very important part of Chinese culture, when gambling, foods can the least important issue. So a quick, easy to access, comfortable and satisfying food option is necessary.
- ❖ **Beverage:** Chinese take gambling very seriously; they care about the results more than the process. Drinking alcohol while gambling is not a smart move even if it is free, because the Chinese believe that alcohol might lead to a loss of control over the game. They normally choose non-alcoholic drinks like hot tea or water while gambling (Benston, 2011a; Latour, Sarrazit & Hendler 2009).

10 Major Dos and Don'ts when encountering Chinese customers

<i>Do</i>	<i>Don't</i>
1. Be polite, modest and well mannered	1. Show too much emotion
2. Respect their history, culture and economic accomplishments	2. Use too many gestures during conversations
3. Be friendly and interpersonal	3. Be too direct and straightforward
4. Offer ways to save face when they lose money	4. Decline favors or requests in public or in front of their subordinates
5. Be quiet and a good listener when dealing with wisdom, authority, and expertise	5. Rudely stop them from squeezing cards too hard while playing
6. Be dependable and reliable	6. Be impatient when they peel cards slowly while gambling
7. Mix friendship with business	7. Express displeasure of players' ritualized behaviors
8. Respect the elder	8. Interrupt during the peak of games by offering drinks or other services
9. Show understanding of their superstitions, ritualized thoughts, and behaviors	9. Touch players' shoulders while they are playing
10. Establish connections and long term relationship	10. Express unpleasantness when they don't tip

- ❖ There are five distinctive Chinese communication characteristics: implicit communication, listening-centered communication, polite communication, insider-communication, and face-directed communication (Fang, & Faure, 2010). These characteristics are the core values and factors that need to be paid special attention when interact with Chinese customers.
- ❖ The impact of Chinese superstition culture on Chinese people's gambling behavior needs to be given attention as well; some typical practices such as the Dont's (5,6,7,8,9) should be commonly acknowledged.
- ❖ Chinese are from a non-tipping culture. People who have never been exposed to foreign cultures might not know that they are expected to tip the service staff when good service is provided.

Conclusion

It is important to consider the financial importance and potential of Chinese customers to the Las Vegas gaming market. Casino operators need to focus on improving customer service in order to differentiate their value propositions and entice customers to visit and return to the same property. A better understanding of Chinese cultural factors such as superstitions, communication styles and gaming characteristics is necessary for casino employees to properly serve them and thus increase satisfaction and patronage (Galletti, 2002; Wong & Fong, 2010). However, these Chinese cultural considerations can be hard for employees to determine from observation, thus an information sheet that is easy to carry and access, but packed with useful information and tips like the one above can come in handy for casino employees.

Recommendations

In order to efficiently communicate and interact with Chinese customers and offer the appropriate, warm, intimate, and interpersonal service that can surpass Chinese customers' expectation and increase their satisfaction, an ongoing staff training that addresses these Chinese cultural issues needs to be created. It is also necessary to hire multi-lingual staff members and interpreters to supervise casino operations and assist staff training. Meanwhile, hire a Feng-shui expert to consult and make necessary changes in the casino to make sure it don't go against the basic Feng-shui rules so that Chinese customers can feel more comfortable playing there. Adding Chinese characters to major signs, direction boards, restaurant menus, and game instructions will work to reduce the culture shock, enhance customers' understanding of the service they receive and most importantly, to make them feel extremely welcome and demonstrate the recognition of their importance to the casino.

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