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UNDERSTANDING CROSS-CULTURAL SERVICE ENCOUNTERS
BETWEEN FINNISH HOTEL EMPLOYEES AND CHINESE GUESTS:
The Perception of Hotel Managers in Helsinki and Rovaniemi

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Abstract:

Chinese outbound tourism has become one of the most exciting phenomena in the Finnish hospitality industry. Over the last decade, Finland has experienced a major boom in tourists' arrivals from China – the number of overnights by Chinese tourists has increased more than fourfold in the last seven years. As a result, the hotel industry is reaping the benefits of Chinese tourism growth by developing strategies to attract those high-spending Chinese tourists. To stay relevant and ahead of the competition, the ability of hotels to cater to the needs of different cultures is a critical factor for success.

The main objective of this study was to gain an understanding of cross-cultural service encounters between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests by taking their cultural background into account. The study obtained qualitative data from semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted from the hotel managers' perspective, who worked at supervisory or managerial levels at hotels in Helsinki and Rovaniemi. The data was analyzed through content analysis by utilising both deductive and inductive coding approaches. The Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions and Hall's high- and low-context communication were taken as the deductive base for the analysis.

Based on the interviews, different cultural issues were identified, which significantly impacted Chinese and Finnish cross-cultural service encounters in a hotel context. Those cultural issues were divided into six categories, referring to the conceptual frameworks. The six categories are Finnish egalitarianism in service encounters, Chinese travelers as social beings, testing the comfort zone of Chinese and Finns, asking for exceptional favors, dealing with language barriers, and interpreting non-verbal cues.

The results showed that Finnish hotel industry should take a broader view of Chinese cultural requirements and cultural expectations. With the differences in service culture between Asians and Westerners, Chinese travellers differed from their Western counterparts in terms of social behaviour and interpersonal communication. The results suggest that in order to stay competitive in the market, hotels should be well-prepared to accommodate the cultural-specific needs of Chinese tourists and to offer them social and psychological familiarity and comfort.

Keywords: cross-cultural, service encounter, cultural dimensions, communication, hotels, China, Finland

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1 INTRODUCTION

A rising tide of travelers from China is spreading out across the region, out-shopping, outspending and out-eating every other nation. They are filling hotels, tour buses and cruise ships. They are overwhelming airports and train stations, and they are sending home petabytes of pictures that encourage their compatriots to join the global invasion. Their ranks are being swollen by millions of others from around Asia, a generation who would rather raise their status with a foreign adventure than with a luxury bag. (Adam Majendie, 2018.)

In the early 1990s, after a long period of isolationism, the Chinese government opened China's borders allowing Chinese people to travel overseas. Since the privilege was granted from government, Chinese outbound tourism has been growing steadily— until, over the past decade, Chinese outbound tourism witnessed a dramatic growth. In 2010, 57 million Chinese traveled overseas and six years later, the number of Chinese outbound trips increased more than twofold up to 135 million (WTO, 2018). The number of Chinese tourists is growing at an unprecedented pace due to the rise of disposable income, fewer visa restrictions, better exchange rates and more flight connections. A rising volume of Chinese tourists has increased so massively that currently, one out of ten international tourists worldwide are hailing from China. The number is significant due to fact that less than 6 percent of Chinese citizens own a passport. (WTO, 2017.)

China is the fastest growing travel market in the world. Therefore, China has become a key driving force of tourism in many countries worldwide, including Finland. Today, China is the fifth-largest source of foreign visitors to Finland (Visit Finland, 2018). Among the most important countries of inbound tourism to Finland, overnight stays by visitors from China and Hong Kong increased the most in 2017 (Statistics Finland, 2018). In 2010, Finland received only 83 000 Chinese overnights (Visit Finland, 2018). In 2017, seven years later, the number of overnights increased more than quadrupled up to 362 000 (Visit Finland, 2018). One third of the total Chinese overnights were spent at a hotel or a motel (Visit Finland, 2016), which shows that the accommodation sector has benefited significantly from receiving an increasing number of Chinese tourists. It implies

that Chinese tourists have become an important customer segment for the tourism industry.

The current wave of Chinese tourists visiting Finland will have a significant impact on the Finnish hotel industry. As the number of Chinese outbound tourists continues to grow in the coming years, hotels will also benefit from evolving demand. Therefore, hoteliers, who are keen on leveraging the growth of Chinese tourism, must recognize the needs of this group and develop concepts and services for them. Even though many hotels have recognized that satisfying customers' needs is critical to their success, providing services to customers from different cultural background is difficult due to the challenges of various cultures and cultural values. To be a successful competitor in this market, it is crucial to understand the impacts of culture, as different cultural backgrounds still have distinct consumer behaviours and value perceptions (Laroche et al., 2004 as cited in Wang et al., 2008, p. 313).

1.1 Previous research

Service encounters have long been an important subject of academic research and numerous scholars have investigated various aspects of service encounters in the hospitality industry. Weiermair (2000), for example, examined tourists' perceptions towards and satisfaction with service quality in cross-cultural service encounters. Mattila et al. (2002) studied the role of emotions in service encounters at first-class hotels. Sundaram et al. (2000) investigated the role of nonverbal communication in service encounters. Sizoo et al. (2004) and Sizoo (2008) examined employee performance during cross-cultural service encounters and the effect of intercultural sensitivity on employee performance.

Due to the rapid development of outbound tourism over the last decades, many researchers (Furrer et al., 2000; Laroche et al., 2004; Mattila 1999; Overby et al., 2005) have activated to study the relationship between culture and service-quality perceptions. These aforementioned authors examined the impact of cultural factors on customer value beliefs and perceived service quality through Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions, and Hall's high- and low-communication context. As a result, they claim that

different cultural groups differ in their perceptions of service quality. Wursten et al. (2009) studied the influence of cultural differences in the strengthening of customer service centres on an international level. Using Hofstede's four original cultural dimensions, they analysed how customer service is influenced by culture. The study indicated that culture has a significant influence on customer service, quality expectations, and customer satisfaction because perceived service quality varies across cultures.

Mattila (1999, 2000) inspected how culture impacts service encounters. Mattila's (1999) study focused on the differences between Western and Asian service consumers' perceptions of service quality in a hotel context. The study was carried out via a survey at hotels in Singapore. The main contrasts between Western and Asian cultures have been explained through communication context (Hall, 1984) and power distance (Hofstede, 1980). The study showed that Asian and Western leisure travellers had highly different perceptions of the service quality. Mattila (1999) argues that Asian countries are characterized by large power distance cultures where the lower position of service employees demands them to respond to customers' requests wholeheartedly and thus offer personalized and high-quality customer service. Mattila (2000) examined culture-based biases in the evaluation of service encounters in a hotel and restaurant setting. The findings supported earlier research; the importance of status differences and expectations of high-quality service. Both researches suggest that a customer's quality perception of service depends on the cultural orientation and service managers should have knowledge of which components of the service delivery are influenced by their customers' cultural backgrounds.

Since outbound tourism from China has been growing quickly, a solid understanding of the new customer segment is crucial for hospitality firms to be successful. Thus, it is important to find out how to deal with customers from different cultures who might be used to having different set of norms in service encounters. Many previous studies (Ahmed et al., 2016; Laroche et al., 2004) have focused on integrating relationships between several aspects of service encounters such as culture, customer satisfaction and service quality perspectives. Less attention has been given particularly to the influence of

culture on service encounters. Further, Svensson (2016) claims that most research in the field of services marketing has overlooked the service providers' perspective and has focused more on the service receiver's perspective. Therefore, this study attempts to fill these gaps by examining the influence of culture on hotel service encounters from service providers perspective. This research brings together two nations, Finland and China, that rarely have been compared before in service encounter studies. The purpose is to understand both nations' cultural behaviours in cross-cultural service encounters.

1.2 Purpose of the study

According to Reisinger (2009, p. 283) cross-cultural service encounters are becoming more and more common in the hospitality industry. Forecasts show that by the year 2020, culturally diverse visitors will be the future targets of the international tourism industry. The change in the tourism industry can be seen already in Finland. The recent boom of Chinese tourists visiting Finland has been a significant contributor to the Finnish hotel industry – overnight stays by visitors from China and Hong Kong increased the most in 2017 (Statistics Finland, 2018). In response to the boom, many hotels have been rethinking and changing their business strategies to target more Chinese tourists.

Pucik and Katz (1986 as cited in Mattila 1999, p. 376) argue that “because culture provides the framework for social interactions, the social rules and customer expectations related to service encounters are likely to vary from culture to culture”. Cultural background has been widely recognized as one of the key factors influencing the behavior of tourists. (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011; Mattila, 1999). According to Li et al. (2011) in order to satisfy and meet Chinese tourists' expectations, it requires knowledge of Chinese cultural behaviour and a broader understanding of their cultural beliefs. Li et al. (2011) state that Chinese travellers expect to get quality services, respect, and better cultural understanding of their preferences and needs (Li et al., 2011, p. 748). Similarly, Reisinger and Turner (1997, p. 141) points out that the most important attribute to tourists from different cultural background are hosts who are aware of, understand, and accept the differences among themselves and tourists.

As Finnish service culture is focused on Western norms and standards, the service is delivered with Western standards. However, the Western service delivery style might not meet the expectations of Chinese tourists. Individuals' perceptions of quality service are very subjective and depend upon the one's cultural background and cultural standards (Reisinger, 2009, p. 237). As Western and Asian cultures have the greatest cultural differences among each other (Sophonsiri & O'Mahony, 2012, p. 136), they evaluate hotel service experiences from their own cultural perspective. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance the understanding of the service expectations of Chinese guests in order to deliver services in a culturally appropriate manner. When customers' cultural expectations and needs are met, the delivered service quality will be favourable. In turn, when customers' cultural expectations and needs are not met in service encounters, the delivered service quality is perceived as failed. (Reisinger, 2009, p. 237.)

The ability to understand and communicate effectively with people across cultures is one of the core requirements in today's business. The main objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of cross-cultural service encounters between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests in a hotel context. Cross-cultural understanding is an essential factor in service encounters to overcome cultural differences and cultural barriers. The goal is to find out how to serve Chinese guests in a more appropriate way by taking their cultural background into account during hotel service encounters. The following research questions are formulated to meet the aim of the study:

RQ1: What are the cultural differences between Chinese guests and Finnish hotel employees?

RQ2: How do these cultural differences reflect in Finnish hotel service encounters?

RQ3: How are Chinese cultural differences considered in Finnish hotel services?

1.3 Research theories and methods

The main theory of this study is Geert Hofstede's model of national culture, which is arguably the most comprehensive study of how values are influenced by culture (National culture). The original theory was conducted already in the late 1960s and early 1970s and his analysis was based on survey data of IBM employees covering more than 70 countries

(Reisinger, 2009, p. 139). Although the original model was established decades ago, Hofstede is still one of the leading academics on culture and dominates cross-cultural studies. It can be proven by the fact that Hofstede's model is one of the most extensively cited and acknowledged theories in cultural studies (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, p. 11). Over the past decades, Hofstede's (1984, 2001) work-related cultural dimensions has been regarded as research paradigm in several fields, particularly in the field of cross-cultural studies.

Hofstede's theory is chosen as a theoretical framework in this study due to its possibility to contrast different cultures: the model's measure instruments allow countries to be compared to one another. In other words, it enables one to determine similarities and differences between the cultures of the countries (see Hofstede, 2010). Hofstede's model of national culture can be used at a national level only, which means that the model was created to analyze the general population, not individuals (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). Therefore, the theory is applicable for this study since the purpose is to examine the phenomenon at a national level not at an individual level.

Hofstede's theory is complemented with Hall's theory of high context culture versus low context culture. Hall and his publications are similarly highly cited, both within the field of intercultural communication and outside of the field (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 1). Hall's theory is chosen in this study in order to illustrate the different communication styles between China and Finland. According to Nishimura et al. (2008, p. 783) communication styles are highly affected by an individual's cultural background, thus knowing the different communication styles usually leads to a better comprehension and understanding in service encounters.

The present study has utilized a qualitative approach and the empirical data is collected by semi-structured face-to-face interviews during February and May 2018. Six hotel managers, who work in different types of hotels in Helsinki and Rovaniemi were interviewed and the study is conducted from their perspective. The target hotels are located in the Helsinki and Rovaniemi regions, because these two cities accommodate most of the Chinese tourists in Finland. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen as a data collection method due to the possibility to conduct information about the

subject within its real-life context. As participants are considered the experts of the hotel field, the method allowed a researcher to gain long-term field information of the research subject. The interview consisted of 14 open-ended interview questions formed 48 pages of transcribed text. The empirical data is analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis was chosen as a data analysis method, because it offers objective guidelines in the coding of large bodies of text and it helps to draw conclusions from the data. The coding was implemented in Atlas.ti content analysis software by utilising both deductive and inductive coding approaches.

1.4 Structure of the study

The present study consists of seven main chapters. The study begins with an introduction, which explains the general information of the study i.e. the background of the study, previous researches and the overall purpose of the study. The study continues representing a cultural overview of China. This second chapter discusses the concept of culture, a brief history of Chinese culture, and a comparison between Asian and Western service cultures. In the third chapter, the cross-cultural management models by Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall are presented. Geert Hofstede's six national dimensions are explained more thoroughly and scores of China and Finland are compared. Furthermore, different Chinese and Finnish communication styles are discussed through the lens of Edward Hall's model of high-context and low-context communication. At the end of this chapter, the criticism of cross-cultural models is reviewed. In the fourth chapter, the study continues representing how this qualitative study is conducted i.e. empirical context, semi-structured interviews, content analysis and ethical considerations. The fifth chapter presents the empirical findings. This chapter compares the empirical data with the conceptual framework, emerging six categories of cultural issues from the data. In the next chapter, a discussion section elaborates the most important findings in more detail. The study finishes with a conclusions chapter, which concludes the main findings and limitations, as well as suggests the directions for future studies.

2 CULTURAL OVERVIEW OF CHINA

This chapter defines the concept of culture, which has been defined in multiple ways. Then approaching to one of the world's oldest cultures: Chinese culture. A brief history of Chinese culture presents Chinese cultural values, the Chinese cultural system, the Cultural Revolution, and history. At the end of the chapter, the Asian and Western service cultures are compared.

2.1 Defining culture

Culture is a complex phenomenon and a problematic notion to define, because the term contains multiple meanings. The word 'culture' comes from the Latin *cultura*, which is related to the words "cultivate", "agriculture" and "cultivation" (Reisinger, 2009, p. 86; Schoenmakers, 2012, p. 9). Originally, the meaning of culture was agriculture and the Romans used the term *cultura* in the context of cultivating the soil (Schoenmakers, 2012, p. 9; Kulkarni, 2012 as cited in table 1). The term developed to refer first to the improvement or sophistication of the individual, particularly through education, and later to the fulfilment of national objectives or ideals (Kulkarni, 2012 as cited in table 1). Slowly, the metaphoric meaning of culture as human development was formed (Schoenmakers, 2012).

The American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) examine the concept of culture and gathered a list of 164 different definitions of culture (Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p. 1). As a conclusion, they propose an all-inclusive and universal definition of culture as the following:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p. 181, as cited in Reisinger, 2009, pp. 89-90)

However, it can be stated that there is no universally accepted definition of culture, because different people portray culture in different ways (Hofstede, Pedersen &

Hofstede, 2002, p. 40). Hereby, many researchers determine the culture according to their own views. Soley and Pandya's (2003, p. 206) definition of culture is "a shared system of perceptions and values, or a group who share a certain system of perceptions and values". It means that each culture sees the world in their own ways due to differences how and what people perceive.

Matsumoto (1996) defines culture "as a shared system of socially transmitted behavior that describes, defines, and guides people's ways of life, communicated from one generation to the next". He continues that because all people have the same biological needs, functions, and universal social problems, people must face comparable issues and approaches for handling these issues are most likely similar. Hereby, many aspects of our mental processes and behaviours can be considered universal due to similarities in our performance (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 220).

Lustig and Koester (1999) argues that people learn culture from other people in social interactions. They define culture as "learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people". They continue that culture is not related to one's birthplace or skin color; it is rather connected to the commonalities and interpretations of members' behaviours (Lustig & Koester, 1999 as cited in Gudykunst & Mody, 2002, p. 208). Similar to this, Hofstede (2010, p. 6) argues that "culture is learned, not innate". According to Hofstede (2010, p. 4), culture is a sort of mental mind programming that everyone carries with them. It includes patterns of thinking, feeling and behaviour that every person has learned from their lives since early childhood. Therefore, mental programming determines what is considered acceptable or attractive behaviour in a culture. When these certain patterns of feeling, acting, and thinking are established in the mind of a human being, learning out of them is much harder than learning for the first time. (see Hofstede, 2010, pp. 4-5.)

Rokeach (1973, as cited in Fan, 2000) states that national culture is best embodied in the values its people hold, hence cultural values shape people's beliefs and attitudes and guide their behaviour. Similarly, Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez and Gibson (2005) observe culture on a national level. They argue that culture consists of national groups' values,

beliefs, norms, and behavioural patterns. Hereby, all members of the national group share similar core values, which differentiate them from other national groups (Leung et al., 2005, p. 363). In this present study, the author examines the phenomenon on a national level. Hereby, national culture is used to describe and explain the interaction between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests in hotel service encounters.

2.2 Chinese culture

China is one of the world's most ancient civilizations, with more than 4,000 years of recorded history (China's history, 2014). Being one of the earliest ancient civilizations, China has one of the oldest cultures in the world, which has evolved over thousands of years. The area in which the culture is dominant covers a large geographical territory. China consists of twenty-three provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, and two special administrative regions: Hong Kong and Macau (Administrative division, 2014). There are multiple languages spoken in China. China's official language is Mandarin Chinese (Capital, 2014). It is one of the seven major dialect groups and most widely spoken dialect in China (Liu, 2010). The current population of China is about 1,38 billion inhabitants, which is roughly 20 per cent of the world's population living within China's borders (Population total, 2018). Robertson (1993) states that regions within a large and complex society such as China, can illustrate significant cultural variation (Littrell et al., 2007, p. 26 as cited in Robertson, 1993). Hereby, Chinese culture is exceptionally diverse and varies widely between regions, (e.g., North, South) provinces, cities, and even towns (Littrell et al., 2007, p. 4).

China is a unified country, which consists of 56 ethnic groups (People, 2014). Han Chinese constitute the largest ethnic group of China, covering more than 90 percent of the Chinese population (People, 2014). Hereby, China is often characterized as an ethnically homogeneous country due to the great majority of Han Chinese. However, even within the Han majority, there are significant cultural differences (Littrell et al., 2007, pp. 6-7). While Han Chinese have common cultural origins, depending on which region the individual comes from, there can be distinct cultures, languages, religions, beliefs, and differences in cultural practices (Littrell et al., 2007, p. 7). The other fifty-five ethnic groups are generally referred to as "ethnic minorities" (People, 2014). According to

Littrell et al. (2007, p. 7) most of those minority groups do not consider themselves Chinese, even though they live inside China's borders. These numerous "ethnic minorities" retain their own distinctive cultures, languages, and customs (People, 2014).

Chen et al. (2014) argue that the Chinese nation's "core culture" is Chinese Han culture, which originates from the Han Dynasty era. Chinese Han culture has an important role in the history of Chinese cultural development as it is a heritage of ancient Chinese traditional culture (Chen et al., 2014). Han culture is a mixture of different cultures from many ethnic groups and it demonstrates great extensiveness and applicability (Chen et al., 2014). Fan (2000, p. 5) considers that Chinese culture is "a national cultural system, which is unique and consistent, shaped by a tradition of four thousand years of history and maintained by the same language". While there are significant differences in terms of political, social and economic dimensions between mainland China and other places where Chinese culture dominates, certain core cultural values are still possible to classify. Fan (2000) examines Chinese cultural values and found 71 Chinese core values such as bearing hardship, kinship, morality and collectivism. Fan's (2000) finding shows that Confucian doctrines are deeply rooted in Chinese values: nearly 40% of the Chinese cultural values are related to Confucianism. Similarly, Lihua (2013) examines Chinese cultural values and suggests that dominant Chinese cultural values are harmony, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, loyalty, and filial piety. All of those values are also related to Confucianism.

The various forms of Chinese cultural systems are discussed by scholars. Fangchuan (2010) argues that the Chinese gigantic cultural system consists of a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and other traditional thinking in ancient China. Fan (2000) partly agrees with the definition but has a wider viewpoint. Fan (2000) suggests that the Chinese cultural system consist of three major elements: traditional culture (e.g. Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism), communist ideology and more recently, Western values. Whereas, Zhongyun (1987) perceives Chinese culture as cultural transformations throughout history. Zhongyun (1987, p. 443) defines Chinese culture in following: "the culture that prevailed in China from the pre-Qin Shi Huang days until the Opium War, a culture with Confucianism at its core, mixed first with Daoism and later with Buddhism". They all acknowledge that the Chinese cultural system has been continuously renewed

and transformed in order to remain in a development of the time and society. Although, there is no generally acknowledged definition of the Chinese cultural system, many interpretations have common components such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Confucianism remains a vital part of Chinese culture. It is generally acknowledged that Confucianism is a foundation of Chinese cultural tradition (Fan, 2000, p. 6). Confucianism is an ethical and philosophical doctrine, based on the teachings of Confucius regarding human relationships, social order, virtuous behaviour, and work ethic (Fan, 2000, p. 6). To put it differently, Confucianism is a sort of moral guide, which emphasizes rituals in daily life as a template for the ideal social norm. It is a complex system of social and political ethics founded to convey societal order and social harmony. Confucianism highlights personal and governmental morality and greatly values hierarchy, group orientation, and respect for age and tradition (Park & Chesla, 2007). The system is based on five main virtues that one has to pursue: *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (integrity, uprightness), *li* (rite and propriety), *chi* (moral understanding), and *shin* (trust) (Park & Chesla, 2007, p. 299). These virtues are considered the most important principles in leading or guiding one's actions (Park & Chesla, 2007, p. 299). Besides, those virtues' influence on Chinese attitudes towards life, they set the patterns of living and standards of social value. Confucianism has been guiding Chinese people's behaviour for more than 2, 000 years and still today Confucian beliefs are ingrained in mainstream ethics and religion (Littrell et al., 2007, p. 9). It means that even today, Confucianism is deeply embedded in the Chinese cultural ideology and values (Littrell et al., 2007, p. 9).

Correspondingly, religions have been impacting ordinary Chinese people's lives for more than two thousand years. The most authentic Chinese religions are Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese folk religion (Albert, 2018). According to Yang and Hu (2012) Chinese folk religion is a combination of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. It embraces aspects of prehistoric times such as ancestor worship, shamanism, divination, magic, ghosts, other spirits, and sacrificial rituals (Yang & Hu, 2012, p. 507). Currently, there are five official religions recognized in China: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Islam, and Protestantism (Albert, 2018). China's law prohibits the practice of any other religion (Albert, 2018). Although the practice of other religions is forbidden, the attitude towards Chinese folk religion is protective and tolerant (Albert, 2018). The Chinese Communist

Party is officially atheist, but in the last 40 years, they have grown more tolerant of religious activity (Albert, 2018). In fact, China's religion observance is on the rise, especially Buddhism, which has developed into the most important religion in China (Albert, 2018). Gernet (1995, p. 471) states that Buddhism has influenced Chinese culture, particularly through literature, language, art, and science. According to the State Bureau of Religious Affairs, in 1997, there were 100 million Buddhists in China (Xueying, 2009). Roughly 15 years later, Liu's (2005) findings demonstrate that the amount has increased up to 300 million (Xueying, 2009). Liu's survey reveals that especially young Chinese are becoming more interested in Buddhism.

Many historical events have impacted Chinese culture in the last 4,000 years. Chinese history is full of power struggles, revolutions, emperors, and wars. However, according to Stanzel (2016) the Cultural Revolution changed Chinese traditional culture more than any other event. The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) was a catastrophic period for Chinese traditional culture. An objective of the massive political movement was to get rid of Chinese traditional elements, the so-called four old evils: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits in order to replace those by Communist ideology (Faure & Fang, 2008, p. 204; Plänklers, 2011, p.228). After ten years of stagnation in Chinese society's development, the Cultural Revolution left behind giant gaps in education and knowledge about Chinese history and culture (Stanzel, 2016). Additionally, numerous historical sites, temples, literature, and painting were destroyed (Stanzel, 2016). Although, the Cultural Revolution's mission was to destroy the Chinese "Four Olds", recent research has shown that elements of Chinese "old culture" were preserved (Ho, 2014, p. 228). Similarly, Littrell et al. (2007, pp. 9-10) argue that the Cultural Revolution could not demolish centuries of adherence to Confucian values. Nevertheless, many researchers claim that the Cultural Revolution was an essential part in a process towards China's modernization (Ho, 2014, p. 226).

Huang (1988, as cited in Wong 2001) argues that "the Chinese culture and values have been quite consistent over the long years despite the change of time". Similarly, Hofstede (2011, p. 22) states that cultural values are stable over time, and in order to change, it needs a longer era, 50 to 100 years, or a sudden, unexpected event. However, Faure and Fang (2008) believe that China's modernization in the past three decades (1978-2008)

has changed Chinese people behaviour significantly. Moreover, they consider that China's modernization might had an impact on Chinese cultural values. China's "open-door" policy since 1978 increased Chinese interaction with foreign cultures and they now have direct contacts with foreign concepts, technologies, cultures, and lifestyles (Faure & Fang, 2008, pp. 194-195). Similarly, Naylor (1996, as cited in Faure & Fang, 2008, p. 205) points out that when people from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another, their values, beliefs, and behaviours change and an evident process of transformation occurs. For the first time in history, the Chinese have an opportunity to access global knowledge, information sharing and cultural learning (Faune & Fang, 2008, p. 194). Hereby, Faune and Fang (2008, p. 196) believe that "door opening" to the Western world entailed the Western value system, which has impacted the Chinese mindset. However, it does not exactly mean that China's old value system is being replaced but these paradoxical values, coexisting in Chinese culture (Faune & Fang, 2008, p. 205).

2.3 Asian and Western service cultures

Sophonsiri and O'Mahony (2012, p. 136) argue that "culture is a determinant of human behavior". Therefore, how people behave and act is guided by their native culture. Asian and Western societies are culturally different; therefore, they perceive and evaluate services differently (Sophonsiri & O'Mahony 2012, p. 136). Turner and Reisinger (2000, as cited in Sophonsiri & O'Mahony 2012, p. 127) found that Asian and Western people culturally vary in terms of their rules of social behavior, perceptions of service, communication styles, satisfaction with service interactions, and expectations of social interaction. During service encounters, Western cultures prefer space in interaction, egalitarian service, informal and direct communication, and goal-oriented service (Sophonsiri & O'Mahony 2012, p. 136). Whereas Asian cultures prefer to establish strong relationships, maintain the hierarchical social order, formal and indirect communication, and people-oriented service (Sophonsiri & O'Mahony 2012, p. 136).

Over the past decade, Asian hospitality has increased in popularity and continues to lead in sensitivity towards the needs of customers within hospitality and cultural-based services (McBride, 2010, as cited in Sucher et al., 2013). Asian hospitality is a mixture

of discipline and human relations management while Western hospitality is mainly focused on discipline. Asian inherent collectivistic values are considered to be the core of Asian hospitality. Due to strong cultural education in a sense of “kindness and giving”, Asians’ warm and caring service attitude is deeply rooted in their service performance. Asian cultures highly appreciate the quality of interpersonal relationships and relationship development. Hereby, they deliver services with a hospitality-minded heart and service-minded attitude. Asian hospitality has received compliments worldwide, thus international Asian hotel brands use the concept of Asian hospitality as a competitive tool to attract Asian tourists in the US and Europe, especially Chinese tourists (McBride, 2010; Smith & Sigaw, 2010; Sonia, 2012 as cited in Sucher et al., 2013). Since Asian and Western hospitality have different service delivery approaches, the Asian hospitality concept may assist hotels to respond to the higher demands of Asian tourists in terms of interpersonal relationships. (see Sucher, 2013.)

Numerous studies have examined Chinese tourists’ service preferences toward hotels. Within the intercultural literature, many studies (Li et al., 2011; Mattila & Patterson, 2004; Sophonsiri & O’Mahony, 2012; Wang et al., 2008) suggest that Chinese service preferences deviate from Western service preferences. Wang et al. (2008) examined Chinese tourists’ perceptions of UK hotel service quality. They found that Chinese tourists’ expectations tend to be high of the UK hotels in terms of service quality due to their belief that developed countries provide higher quality service (Wang et al., 2008, p. 316). Further, Chinese tourists preferred more customized and personalized services than their Western counterparts. The personalized service preference derives from *guanxi*. The word *guanxi* originates from Confucianism, which is used for building connections and personal relationships. Chinese people attach great importance to *guanxi* and to keep hold of Chinese customers, hotels should be consistently polite, protect customers’ face and strive to establish personal relationships (Wang et al., 2008). Mattila (1999) also agree that personalized customer service is a key factor of Chinese evaluation process, because Chinese have a more consumer-centered culture.

Different cultural features influence how Asian and Western cultures respond to service failures. Mattila and Patterson (2004) studied the impact of culture on consumers’

perceptions of service recovery and complaint handling efforts. They found that Western and Asian cultures have different preferences regarding the handling of service failures. In service failure situations, Western customers tend to value tangible compensation and it has a positive effect on customer satisfaction in service recovery process. Thus, it is the most effective service-recovery technique for Western customers. In turn, Asian cultures value employees' efforts in service failure situations. Asian cultures prefer intangible remedies such as fast problem solving and a genuine apology in order to save their face. Due to different preferences regarding the handling of service failures, service providers should pay more attention to the context surrounding the service failure and execute applicable service recovery strategies in order to handle the service failure in a culturally appropriate manner. (see Mattila & Patterson, 2004, pp. 203-204.)

Li et al. (2011, p. 744) examine Chinese tourists' expectations of outbound travel products. They found that Chinese tourists put great importance on providing complimentary hotel amenities. Chinese tourists generally expect that hotels should offer at least hot water, Chinese tea / coffee and a set of "standard amenities" (e.g., toothpaste and toothbrushes, combs, shampoo and lotion, slippers, shoe mitts, even disposable razors and shaving cream), which are traditionally provided in their home country. Especially, water kettle or easy access to hot water is considered to be an essential standard. Chinese tourists may not be able to request their basic amenities due to language barriers and a lack of those facilities may cause a service failure (Li et al., 2011, p. 744). Thus, hotels should add those Chinese "standard amenities" to show greater cultural sensitivity and to impress their Chinese customers.

Saving face is a central cultural value for Chinese society and it is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It is a social concept that comes from the Chinese word *miànzi*, which means one's reputation or dignity. According to Kwok and Dong-Li (2015) *miànzi* symbolizes the respect of others, particularly in public settings. Moreover, Chinese try to avoid inappropriate behavior or comments that may result in embarrassments and dissatisfactions of others. The concept of face plays a significant role in Chinese peoples' social interactions. The old Chinese saying "a gentleman can be killed but cannot be humiliated" demonstrates the importance of face to Chinese (Wee, 2001, p. 188 as cited in Lee & Sparks, 2007, p. 521). Moreover, the metaphor means that a Chinese who is

humiliated publicly in front of others will suffer a loss of face. This is considered worse than being killed hence causing someone to lose face is unforgivable.

Since Chinese highly value the protection of face in service encounters, service providers need to be careful how they address Chinese tourists. Lee and Sparks (2007) have an example of a poorly managed customer service situation with a Chinese; a hotel manager lectured a Chinese guest how to lock a door in front of his friends. The Chinese guest felt embarrassed due to public humiliation, and as a result he experienced loss of face (Lee & Sparks 2007, p. 514). According to Lee et al. (2013, p. 390), there is a greater possibility that Chinese customers experience a loss of face if the service provider's interpersonal treatment is more negative than positive. Lee et al. (2013) highlight the importance of saving and giving face, because it is strongly associated with Chinese tourists' satisfaction in both public and private settings.

3 CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT MODELS

This chapter introduces briefly the concept of cross-cultural management in service encounters. It continues to present the cross-cultural management models by Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall. Hofstede's dimensions are explained more thoroughly, and the scores of China and Finland are compared. Further, different Chinese and Finnish communication styles are discussed through the lens of Edward Hall's model. Finally, the criticism of cross-cultural models is reviewed.

3.1 Cross-cultural management in service encounters

“Cross-cultural management explains the behavior of people in organizations around the world and shows people how to work in organizations with employees and client populations from many different cultures” (Adler, 2008 as cited in Kavar, 2012, p. 107). Cross-cultural management looks at how people from different backgrounds communicate and how they endeavor to communicate across cultures. Cross-cultural management seeks to identify the similarities and differences across cultures and it assists to manage cultural diversity in the workplace. Cross-cultural refers to a comparison and contrast between two or more cultural groups, in which one culture is often considered “the norm” and all other cultures are compared to the dominant culture.

Hospitality industry employees often face intercultural service encounters that require knowledge of another culture's backgrounds and their different communication styles. Intercultural service encounters involve interaction between an employee of one culture and a customer of another culture (Sizoo et al., 2004, p. 62). According to Reisinger (2009, p. 36) cultural misunderstanding and conflict often occurs in cross-cultural encounters when the host is delivering services to the customers. During cross-cultural encounters, different cultural norms and values influence customers' expectations, their perceptions about employee performance and evaluation of service quality (Reisinger, 2009, p. 240). Reisinger (2009, p. 213) argue that there are two main difficulties in social interaction that occur in a cross-cultural context: interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal) and social behavior. People can offend others without meaning to due to

their cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication, such as polite language usage, attitudes, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact (Reisinger, 2009, p. 213). Also, the difficulties may occur in social behavior, because of differences in rules and patterns of social behavior such as greetings, self-disclosure, and making or refusing requests (Reisinger, 2009, p. 213). Thus, the manner in which a service provider interacts with a customer will directly influence a customer's service experience. If the customer is not properly understood, it can result in a disappointed customer, a frustrated employee, or even a loss business (Sizoo et al., 2004, p. 74).

Sizoo et al. (2004, p. 74) argue that cross-cultural conflicts are avoidable and that hospitality organizations should use existing knowledge of cross-cultural encounters to customize service for different cultures. Sizoo et al. (2004, p. 74) suggest that hospitality management should hire and educate inter-culturally sensitive employees, because employees with high intercultural sensitivity generally provide better service, understand better the needs of diverse customers, and they achieve better results for the company. They continue that training intercultural sensitivity of employees will benefit organizations in the long-term with respect to having more satisfied customers, positive word-of-mouth, repeat business, and increased revenue. Reisinger and Turner (1998 as cited in Alshaibani et al., 2016, p. 2) suggest that developing positive cross-cultural service encounters requires an understanding of cultural differences between host and tourists in terms of cultural values, rules of behavior, attitudes, perceptions, and verbal and non-verbal communication (Reisinger and Turner, 1998 as cited in Alshaibani et al., 2016, p. 2).

3.2 Hofstede's dimensions of national culture

Scholars have adopted different frameworks in understanding cultural differences in service encounters. Many researchers (Furrer et al., 2000; Laroche et al., 2004; Ling et al., 2007; Mattila, 1999; Overby et al., 2005) have based their study on Hofstede's (1980) model of national culture. It is a framework for cross-cultural comparisons, which recognizes the differences between diverse cultures. Hofstede's model of national culture offers a framework for comparison and contrast between two cultural groups and it

appears to be the most commonly used framework for studying the effects of cross-national cultures.

Hofstede's (2011) model of national culture is divided into six different dimensions namely: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. These dimensions portray the impact of the culture ingrained in a society on the values of the members of that society. The theory is based on the idea that each country's values can be placed on six cultural dimensions, which enables different cultures to be compared to one another. Besides, it describes the set of norms, behaviors, beliefs, and customs that exist within the population of a country. (see Hofstede, 2011.)

According to Reisinger (2009, p. 99) national culture refers to a culture of a national group, which can be called "country" culture. The definition can only be used in this way if a country has clearly defined regional boundaries (Reisinger, 2009, p. 99). Hofstede has separated mainland China from Hong Kong and Taiwan in his model of national culture (see Country comparison) thus this study only focuses on national culture in mainland China. However, mainland China is a large territory with 56 ethnicities (Ethnic groups in China, 2014), hence it is acknowledged here that Hofstede's model represents stereotypes and generalizes members of society. Hereby, Hofstede's model is only used as a directional framework to make interpretations of cultural differences.

In the following sections, Hofstede's dimensions are explained more thoroughly, and the scores of China and Finland are compared. Figure 1. below illustrates that there exist significant cultural differences between Finnish and Chinese cultures. This study represents all of Hofstede's six dimensions, but the emphasis is on the original dimensions, namely power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. Many previous researches (Mattila, 1999; Wursten et al. 2009) have focus on certain dimensions from Hofstede's model. The four dimensions are chosen because their effects are more immediate to the subject.

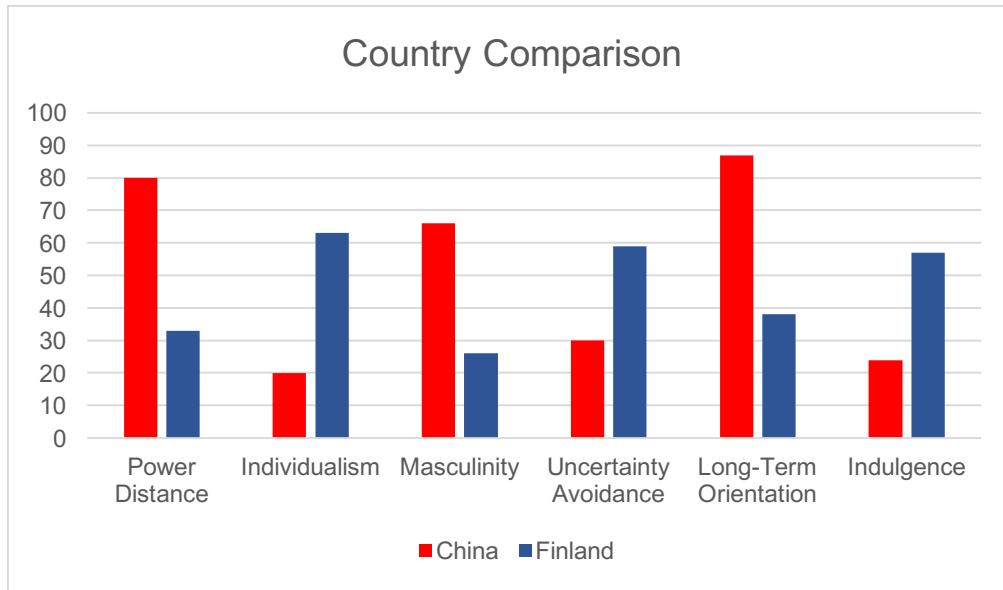


Figure 1. Hofstede’s country comparison between China and Finland. Source: Country comparison.

Power Distance

Hofstede (2011, p. 9) has defined power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”. In other words, it expresses the degree to which society tolerates and handles hierarchy and distribution of power. In large power distance countries, members of a society understand and accept their place in the hierarchy without any further justifications (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). On the contrary, in small power distance countries, members of a society aspire to equalize the distribution of power, given that the power is shared evenly in a society (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). Despite numerous countries’ striving towards equality, all societies are more or less unequal (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). Hofstede’s (2010) model measures power distance on a scale from 0 to 100; scores close to 0 represent a small power distance and scores close to 100 represent a large power distance.

China belongs to a large power distance culture and takes a high position in Hofstede’s scale. China’s PDI (Power Distance Index) is 80, which is very high compared to the average PDI, 71, of Asian countries (Country comparison). The high score of PDI illustrates, that the hierarchy system exists in society and Chinese consider each other as

existentially unequal, which results in an acceptance of the visible signs of the social status (Hofstede, 2010, p. 73). Thus, it is expected that a person in a lower position must show respect to a person in a higher position (Mattila, 1999, p. 378). Chinese with a high social status have a good position in the hierarchy, which entitles them different privileges (Hofstede, 2010, p. 73)

Chinese unequal relationships originate from Confucianism. Dong Zhongshu's old saying "ministers must obey emperor; children must obey parents; wife must obey husband" still influence Chinese society's behaviour nowadays (Li & Xiong, 2012, pp. 375-376). The old saying refers to Chinese hierarchical order. A person with higher rank is expected to take care of a person in a lower position. In turn, a person with a lower rank must obey and honour a person in the higher position. Over time, Chinese thinkers have encouraged that all members of the society should have different positions and each member should behave in a proper way according to their social position (Li & Xiong, 2012, p. 375).

Finland stands on small power distance with a score of 33 points, which refers to the importance of democracy, independence and egalitarianism to Finnish society (Country comparison). Finns expect and agree that the power should be shared equally amongst the population (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). The low PDI score indicates that Finnish culture is characterized by strong individualism, low tolerance of authority, loose social networks and a desire to protect egalitarian values. They have a little use of formal titles and last names are rarely used when addressing others. (Country comparison.)

In terms of customer service, power distance is a central factor to consider, especially when a guest comes from another culture than a service provider and their power distance gap is significant. People from large power distance cultures are sensitive to status, hence it is critical to take into account customers' social class and honour their status in service encounters (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). Moreover, these people desire to interact with the same level of authority and they prefer formal interaction. According to Wursten et al. (2009) a failure situation may arise if an employee from small power distance culture serves all customers equally and ignores customers' expectations from large power distance cultures. Mattila (1999, p. 378) state that due to different standards for delivering

customer service problems may occur, since in small power distance cultures, employees accept fewer status differences and tend to deliver egalitarian service.

Mattila (1999) examines the relationship between weak customer service providers and powerful customers in a hotel context. She argues that customers from large power distance cultures value more personalized customer service than their small power distance culture counterparts. Mattila (1999) continues that the differences can be explained due to the power distance dimension. People from large power distance cultures can be characterized by differences in terms of social class, education level, and occupation (Dash et al., 2009, p. 340). With these factors, the society can be divided between more powerful and less powerful people. According to Wang et al. (2008, p. 317) in Chinese culture, hotel employees are classified into a less-powerful position. Hereby, Chinese customers set high levels of overall service expectations to hotel employees and assume to get first-rate service from hotel employees who are in weak positions from their point of view (Wang et al., 2008, p. 317). Mattila (1999) also states that in large power distance cultures, service employees with lower social status are required to respond to customers' requests wholeheartedly and thus offer personalized and high-quality customer service.

Individualism versus Collectivism

The first group that affects an individual's life is the family we are born into. In the most collective societies, children belong to a family that grows up with large extended families. As they grow up, the children learn to see themselves as members of their own group, separate from other groups and their members. The term collectivistic is thus characterized by societies in which individuals have, from birth, been associated with strong and cohesive groups. They have a lifelong loyalty to these groups and breaking the loyalty is one of the most shameful things to do in collective cultures. (see Hofstede 2010, p. 91.)

Individualism versus collectivism indicates how loose or tight the social framework is for members of the society (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 92). According to Hofstede (2011, p.

11) individualism refers to societies where individuals are loosely tied together: members of a society are expected to look after themselves and their immediate family. On the contrast, collectivism refers to societies where the ties between individuals are strong and where people are integrated in cohesive in-groups and extended families (Hofstede, 2011 p. 11). Collectivistic cultures see the members of a society as part of a group or a “collective”, whereas individualistic cultures consider themselves independent individuals with unique attributes (Wang & Chen 2010, p. 2). In individualistic cultures, people emphasize rationality in behaviour and personal needs, social norms, and attitudes as important determinants of social behaviour (Wang & Chen 2010, p. 2). The collectivistic cultures prioritize groups’ commitments and group harmony, hence the needs and interests of in-groups take higher priority than individuals’ personal needs (Wang & Chen 2010, p. 2).

China is a highly collectivistic culture with a low individualistic score of 20, which means that Chinese are integrated into collective groups (Country comparison). Supposedly, collectivism originates from a history when Chinese ancient thinkers thought that members of a society belong to and depend on the group and society (Li & Xiong, 2012, p. 375). Fan Zhongyan’s saying, “show your concern for others at first, and enjoy yourself at last” is still present in modern Chinese society (Li & Xiong, 2012, p. 375). Chinese value a concept of “group first” and consider it as a set of morals with Chinese tradition (Li & Xiong, 2012, p. 375). Hereby, Chinese society underline the importance of harmony, safety, and steadiness of groups and the interest of the group members prevails over the interest of the individual (Li & Xiong, 2012, p. 375).

A famous Chinese philosopher Xun Zi stated, “all things under the sun will flourish when harmony prevails” (Müller, 2012). The quote captures the importance of harmony for Chinese society. Reisinger (2009, p. 131) also concurs that Chinese believe that it is better to keep oneself in the background rather than break the group harmony. Chinese culture maintains the group harmony by emphasizing values such as politeness, deference of authority, and preservation of face (Reisinger, 2009, p. 131). Preservation of face is especially important in order to avoid embarrassing situations, because losing the face is regarded as incorrect behaviour (Reisinger, 2009, p. 131.)

Although China is a highly collectivist culture, it is argued lately that over time, China may be shifting towards individualism (Leung, 2008, p. 185). Triandis (1995, as cited in Leung, 2008, p. 185) states that cultures are changing and that when societies become wealthier, they also become more individualistic. It is based on the fact that the need for interdependence is lessened. Similarly, Zeng and Greenfield (2015) found that rising individualism goes hand in hand with growing urbanism, increasing wealth, and higher levels of formal education. However, Yan (2010, p. 490) claims that Chinese individualization began during the Maoist era in 1949-76. He states that some collectivist programmers of social engineering and the socialist path of modernization under Maoism partly caused Chinese society's individualization.

Sun and Wang (2010) assume that the young Chinese generation have already shifted from traditional values to modern values. Western ideology is reshaping the social values and norms of the younger generations in China, thus they are more individualistic than the older generation (Sun & Wang, 2010, p. 65) The young generation is more likely to live according to their own lifestyle preferences and less likely to obey the traditional collective ideology (Sun & Wang, 2010). Hereby, Chinese parents and educators have started to teach individualistic skills to children in order to keep up in a market-oriented society (Yu, 2002, as cited in Zeng & Greenfield, 2015).

Finland is an individualistic country with a score of 63 on Hofstede's scale (Country comparison). Individualistic cultures tend to focus on individualized relationships: take care of themselves and their immediate families rather than the welfare of others (Country comparison). Individualistic cultures emphasize individualism due to personal goals that boost one's status, competition, and self-confidence (Reisinger, 2009, p. 131). They are focused on personal achievements, thus they feel responsible for their own success and failure (Reisinger, 2009, p. 151) Members of high individualistic cultures are self-oriented, emotional, expressive, and desire skills that can help them to accomplish their individual objectives (Reisinger, 2009, pp. 50, 149). These societies use direct requests to pursue their goals, because they believe it is the most effective way, whereas members of collectivistic cultures believe that direct request are a less effective approach to reaching goals (Reisinger, 2009, p. 149).

Reisinger (2009) argues that the background of tourists and hosts influences the expectations of how they perceive service. Reisinger continues that a good quality of service is seen differently in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures. For instance, in China, the host perceives a good service quality by ignoring customers' expectations. Moreover, it is common to escort customers all over the place, execute a tight itinerary, and not give them any chance to experience Chinese life on their own. Tight itineraries and occupying every moment of customers' time demonstrates a quality service for Chinese people, whereas Western tourists from Europe may perceive such hospitality as irritating uncomfortable, or even an intrusion of privacy. (see Reisinger, 2009, p. 238.)

According to Wursten et al. (2009) in the customer service context, individualism-collectivism can be explained with the direction of loyalty. It determines whether the individual's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we" (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). This clarifies the order of importance: the task or the relationship (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). In other words, if a service provider is from an individualistic culture, s/he is most likely task-oriented, but if a service provider is from collective culture, s/he would build up a harmonious relationship and establish trust with the customer. These orientations influence how the service is delivered to the customer, and likewise, how the customer experiences the service encounter.

Masculinity versus Femininity

The masculinity versus femininity dimension indicates the preference to which cultural values are dominant in a society: masculinity or femininity (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). Moreover, it refers to the distribution of values between the genders. According to Hofstede (2010), masculinity emphasizes hard emotional values whereas femininity emphasizes soft emotional values. In masculine societies, people are driven by "masculine" motivations such as assertiveness, achievements, materialism, heroism, and competitiveness (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002, p. 64; Hofstede, 2011 p. 12). In feminine cultures, people are driven by "feminine" motivations such as cooperation, modesty,

quality of life, and caring for others (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). The dimension measures societies' masculinity (MAS) index: a high MAS score indicates that the society shows a greater tendency for masculinity values, and a lower MAS score indicates a greater tendency for feminine values.

With a score of 66, China is a masculine country, which means the society is competition and success oriented (Country comparison). The need for ensuring success can be proven by the fact that Chinese are willing to sacrifice family and leisure time for work (Country comparison). High MAS societies appreciate status, hence it shows the accomplishment of the individual (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002, p. 64). Similarly, high MAS cultures admire luxury articles due to the chance to display one's achievement (Mooij & Hofstede, 2002, p. 65). At school, Chinese students put much effort in academic performance, because they assimilate that excellent scores are the main criteria to be successful in life (Country comparison).

A low MAS score of 26 illustrates that Finland is a vastly feminine culture, which refers to traits associated with nurture (Country comparison). Finnish society puts a great importance on values such equality, solidarity, and quality of life (Country comparison). Finns tend to concentrate on the welfare of others, caring and nurturing behaviour, and they have sympathy for the weaker members of the society (Reisinger, 2009, p. 140). Their working life is more focused on "working in order to live" rather than living in order to work (Country comparison). Hereby, flexibility and free time is highly appreciated in Finnish society. Finland represent a society in which gender roles are equal and overlapped: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Reisinger, 2009, p. 140).

Gender roles are more differentiated and unequal in masculine countries than in feminine countries (Reisinger, 2009, p. 140). According to Hofstede (2010) in masculine countries, some characteristics are considered to be only for men or only for women. Men are believed to be ambitious, determined, and have a sense of responsibility, while women are believed to be modest, caring, and tender (Hofstede, 2010, p. 154). Conversely, in

feminine countries, these all terms are considered to apply to both genders (Reisinger, 2009, p. 140).

The masculinity-femininity dimension explains the type of motivations valued by the culture. During service encounters, service providers should consider how the customers' cultural background reflect on the service setting. According to Wursten et al. (2009) people from masculine cultures are sensitive customers, who prefer a respectful service in front of other customers, extra discounts, and other exceptional favours. Service providers should go the extra mile and give 100 percent for their guests (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). In feminine cultures, service providers should focus more on customers' equal treatment and building long-lasting relationships (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). Similarly, the perception of beauty is seen differently. According to De Mooij and Hofstede (2002, p. 64), masculine cultures perceive that "big is beautiful" whereas feminine cultures believe that "small is beautiful". All these differences are worthy to be taken into account in service encounters while delivering a service.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede (2010, p. 191) defines uncertainty avoidance (UAI) as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations". These unstructured situations can be unpredictable, novel, surprising, unforeseen, and different from typical situations (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). The dimension illustrates members of a society's willingness to take unknown risks and indicates society's need for predictability (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). A low score of UAI shows that people in a society accept ambiguous situations. These societies are more comfortable with unclear information, accept risks, are open to changes and innovations and are less stressed (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139). On the opposite end of the spectrum, high UAI cultures, risk-averse individuals aspire toward stability, structured rules, and social norms (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139). These societies try to avoid unpredictable situation and conflicts by laws and regulations, strict behavioral codes, formal written rules and disapproval of deviant opinions (Hofstede, 2011 p. 10; Reisinger, 2009, p. 139).

With a score of 30 on this dimension, Chinese culture is uncertainty-tolerant (Country comparison). A low score indicates that Chinese people have a low preference for avoiding uncertainty. Therefore, Chinese culture easily accepts the uncertainty of life and everyday life is taken as it comes. Low-UAI cultures have a more relaxed attitude and they are more tolerant for taking risks (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139). By accepting uncertainty, Chinese are more flexible, desire fewer rules and guidelines, and deviance from the norm is more easily tolerated (Country comparison). Low-UAI cultures strive for advancements, competition and their decisions are usually based on common sense (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139).

In low UAI cultures, interpretations are multidimensional and they are usually based on individuals' life experience. The Chinese language is full of ambiguous meanings, which means that the listener is expected to find out the "true" meaning of the conversation beside the surface information (Country comparison). Sometimes, these interpretations can be related to supernatural standpoints. China is a superstitious society, which relies on astrology (Khairullah & Khairullah, 2013, p. 8). Hereby, ordinary Chinese people and government officials can both build their decisions on "astrological signs" such as the position of stars, lucky dates, or Chinese zodiac signs (Khairullah & Khairullah, 2013, p. 8).

With a score of 59, Finnish society has a high preference for avoiding uncertainty and ambiguity (Country comparison). High UAI cultures strive for order in society, thus rules and regulations are expected and appreciated in the Finnish culture (Country comparison). Finnish society is characterized by strong work ethic, adherence to time, and an inner need to be busy (Country comparison). Similarly, punctuality is highly valued and it is a norm (Country comparison). High UAI societies pursue stability and therefore security and safety are vastly esteemed values in life (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139).

Finnish and Chinese societies have prominent differences in avoiding uncertainty (Country comparison). These differences can reflect themselves in service encounters if a service provider and a customer are on opposite sides of the dimension. According to Wurster et al. (2009, p. 3), in weak-uncertainty cultures, customers are more relaxed,

open-minded, they prefer practical solutions, and they do not require much information in the decision-making process. Moreover, they are not comfortable with showing their emotions and they are averse to loud, emotional, and aggressive behaviour (Wurster et al., 2009, p. 4). Conversely, people from strong-UAI cultures avoid unfamiliar situations and risks, they desire to be in control, and they require more information in the decision-making process (Wurster et al., 2009, p. 3). Problems may occur if a service provider does not take a counterpart's cultural differences into consideration in a service encounter.

Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation

The long-term versus short-term orientation dimension was not part of Hofstede's original societal dimensions, in fact, it was added to Hofstede's model in 1991 (Hofstede, 2011, p. 13). The dimension was originally labeled as Confucian Work Dynamism hence it contains certain Confucian values but it was later changed to long-term versus short-term orientation (Hofstede & Minkov 2010, p. 495; Hofstede, 2011, p. 13). The dimension was added due to its possibility to capture the essence of Asian cultures' values, particularly Confucian values (Wachner, 2013, pp. 8-9). The dimension refers to societies' different viewpoints of time orientation and traditions (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). These time orientations are measured on a scale from 0 to 100; scores close to 0 represent short-term orientation and scores close to 100 for long-term orientation.

The dimension is defined as "the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view" (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011, p. 183). In other words, it specifies societies' time horizon; whether the society looks into the future or lives in the present or past. Long-term orientation cultures aspire towards future-oriented virtues (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). They aim to establish long-term goals, hence they foster pragmatic values such as persistence, frugality, and humility (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 236, 242). On the contrast, short-term orientation cultures focus on the present or past and consider those as more important than the future (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 239). These societies value traditions,

fulfilment of social obligations, personal stability, and preservation of face (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 237).

China takes the highest position on the long-term orientation scale with a score of 87 (Country comparison; Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 240). The high score indicates that China is a very pragmatic culture and puts a great importance on pragmatic values such as perseverance, adaptiveness, and thriftiness (Country comparison). Long-term societies have a tenacity to achieve their goals and they do not expect immediate satisfaction of their desires (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 242). Moreover, they focus on long-term implications of their actions to achieve long-term benefits (Khairullah & Khairullah, 2013, p. 6). Long-term cultures determinedly pursue their goals, even if the goals are difficult to reach (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 497). Similarly, they acknowledge that circumstances change from time to time, hence it is natural for them to change decisions. Chinese are encouraged to be frugal thus they have a strong tendency to save and invest (Country comparison). Hence, these long-term orientation cultures focus on future-oriented perspectives and take a longer view of time and action to plan for the future.

Finland scores 38 on this dimension, which means that Finland is a short-term oriented culture (Country comparison). It shows that Finnish people are not willing to make long-term plans and mainly focus on achieving short-term goals. They try to achieve quick results and immediate gratification is more valued than long-term fulfilment (Country comparison; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010, p. 497). Finns believe in absolute truth and they rely on traditions, which they consider immutable (Country comparison). Finnish people tend to live in a moment and they rather spend than save money for the future (Country comparison). Hereby, these short-term orientation cultures focus more on the near future and they do not have a tendency to plan for the more distant future.

Indulgence versus Restraint

In 2010, Hofstede added a sixth dimension, indulgence versus restraint, which is focused on “happiness research” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). A new dimension was created to capture aspects around themes of happiness that have not been discovered formerly in the five other dimensions (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). The new dimension consists of three

“happiness items”: subjective happiness, importance of leisure and friendship, and life control (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 280). These aforementioned terms are considered to be the foundation of happiness (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 280). The “happiness level” has been measured on a scale: a high score closer to 100 represent a more indulgent society and a low score closer to 0 represent a more restrained society (Country comparison).

The dimension is defined as “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised” (Country comparison). Moreover, it explains how members of a society approach the fulfilment of their desires. Indulgent societies are considered to have weaker control over their desires (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). Hereby, they are more likely to allow or encourage free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). On the contrast, restrained societies have stronger control over their desires and the gratification of needs has been regulated by strict social norms (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15). Restrained societies strive for maintaining order in a nation whereas indulgent societies place more importance on freedom of speech (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 295).

China has a low score of 24 in this dimension and thus it is characterized as a restrained society (Country comparison). It means that Chinese people are willing to sacrifice their own desires in order to align more with societal norms. Restrained societies favor frugality, moral discipline and tight relationships (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 291). These societies are more likely to feel helplessness, as they are not able to decide their own actions: “what happens to me is not my own doing” (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 291). Chinese have a tendency towards pessimism and cynicism and they remember more negative emotions (Country comparison; Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 288). Leisure time is not considered vital and many Chinese will sacrifice family and leisure priorities for work (Country comparison).

Finland is an indulgent country with a score of 57 (Country comparison). It indicates that Finns are willing to realize their impulses and desires in order to enjoy life and having fun (Hofstede., 2011, p. 15). Pursuit of happiness and subjective health are highly appreciated values in indulgent societies (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 289). Finns have a

tendency towards optimism and positive attitudes, hence they are more likely to recall positive emotions (Country comparison; Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 288). Moreover, they hold in great esteem leisure time, freedom, and personal control (Country comparison). Hereby, Finns decide independently how to spend their time and money (Country comparison).

3.3 Hall's High and Low Context Cultures

It is generally acknowledged that effective communication between people from different cultures is challenging because they tend to communicate in slightly different ways. In order to understand these different communication styles, Edward T. Hall (1976) proposed a concept of high and low context cultures to describe, analyze, and interpret cultural differences. Hall's (1976) concept allows that all cultures can be positioned in a continuum "to represent the extent to which 'contexting' occurs in the culture" (Kim et al., 1998, p. 508). According to Kim et al. (1998, p. 509) the concept is widely used in cross-cultural communication studies due to the possibility to understand how people relate to one another in a culture particularly in communication, social bonds, responsibility, commitment, and social harmony. This study focuses only on the communication part because service encounters are based on customers' and service providers' communication (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). According to Sundaram and Webster (2000), communication directly impacts customers' evaluation of service experience and determines customer perceptions of service quality (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

According to Hall (1976) all cultures can be divided in two categories: high and low context cultures. Hall's (1976, p. 91) concept is based on the idea that cultures can be placed on a continuum from high to low context cultures: "high-context messages are placed at one end and low-context messages at the other end of a continuum". Setting up countries in a continuum enables different cultures to be compared on a scale from high to low context. However, it must be noted that cultures cannot be categorized strictly into either high or low context cultures, hence no culture uses exclusively low-context or high context communication styles (Hall, 1976). Therefore, many countries are situated

between the extremes on the continuum and share features of both high and low context traits (Gamsriegler, 2005, pp. 3-4).

China belongs to a high-context culture and it is positioned towards the high end of the continuum (see Figure 2). In contrast, Finland, as part of the Scandinavian countries, is at the low end of the continuum (see Figure 2). The long gap indicates that Chinese and Finnish communication styles differ significantly in verbal and nonverbal communication. Hence, Chinese and Finns will never communicate alike, which leads to a point that they cannot experience situations in the same ways (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 4). These differences in communication styles are expected to pose challenges in hotel service encounters, thus it is critical to understand how these different societies perceive communication in different ways.

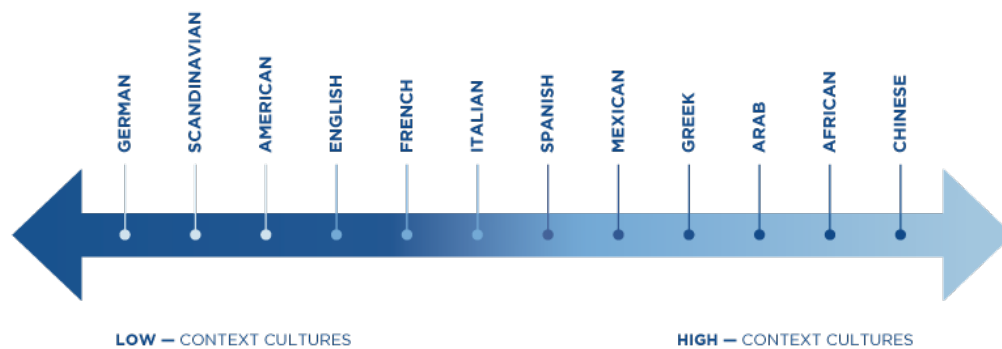


Figure 2. Hall's high and low context cultures continuum. Source: Neese, 2016.

High-context communication

Hall's (1976) concept refers to how people communicate in different cultures. Moreover, it indicates the extent to which cultures place value on indirect and direct communication. Hall (1976) defines his concept as follows:

A high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context communication is

just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code.

High-context cultures use communication that focuses more on the underlying context, meanings, and tone of voice rather than just words themselves (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, most of the meanings lie in the physical context such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, silence, proximity, and other non-verbal expressions (Würtz, 2006, p. 278). Within these cultures, the communication is indirect, and messages are transmitted ambiguously, harmoniously, and reservedly (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785). The communication is usually linear in a way that people speak one after another and the speaker is rarely disturbed during the conversation (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785). The primary communication goal is to protect and strengthen relationships by preservation of face and ensuring harmony (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 4).

In terms of customer service, it is crucial to be aware of these different communication styles because it usually leads to a better understanding, comprehension, and to mutual respect (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 783). People from high context cultures communicate in a way that messages can be contextualized by assuming that a listener has the same mindset than as the speaker (Kim et al., 1998, p. 512). As a conclusion, a speaker does not explicitly say internal meanings and the messages themselves contain less verbal information such as words, sentences, and grammar (Kim et al., 1998, p. 512). These internal meanings are typically embedded deep in the information and not expressed clearly in writing or when spoken (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785). Thus, the listener is expected to “read between the lines” and interpret meanings conveyed in the message (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785).

Low-context communication

In low-context cultures, the communication is transmitted through verbal messages in a way that the spoken words carry most of the meaning (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 3). These cultures expect communication to be explicitly stated through clear language with no risks of confusions (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785). Moreover, low-context cultures tend to have fewer non-verbal expressions in communication (Würtz, 2006, p. 278). The primary

communication goal is to give and get information in a communication process (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 3). Their communication style is direct, precise, open, and based on feelings (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785).

In low-context cultures, people rely on verbal communication and the messages are communicated almost entirely by the words (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, the words are more important than the surrounding social context. These cultures communicate in a way that the meanings are clearly stated through verbal language: what a person says is exactly what they mean. People are not expected to understand anything about the specific situation or context to be able to correctly interpret what they have said: 'yes' means 'yes', and 'no' means 'no'. (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785). The aim is to give verbal information in a way that messages can be understood by as many people as possible and explanations are expected if spoken words are not clearly stated (Nishimura et al., 2008, p. 785).

3.4 Criticism of cross-cultural models

Hofstede's (1980) theory of cultural differentiation is a widely used framework in cross-cultural studies, because it is proven to be precise enough for analyzing countries' culture (Reisinger, 2009, p. 143). However, the framework has faced criticism by other researches. Würtz (2009, p. 276) disapproves of how Hofstede classifies cultures according to geographical borders, because territory-based borders are different from the cultural borders. Likewise, the measurement instruments have been formed to be used at country or geographical level only (Reisinger, 2009, p. 143). It means that the theory measures the averages of a country or geographical area, hence the theory cannot be used for comparing the values of individuals, but only the general population. Similarly, it must be noted that the theory mostly comprises values of a dominant culture within a nation and does not consider, for instance, subcultures or religions (Reisinger, 2009, p. 143). The theory is also criticized since categorization forms stereotypes where the population is assumed to be a homogeneous whole (Würtz, 2009, p. 276).

Hofstede's theory has been questioned due to its validity and reliability to differentiate cultures. According to Würtz (2006, p. 276) Hofstede's dimensions are outdated since it

was published decades ago and the results may not be applicable anymore. Many researches (Orr & Hauser, 2008; Wu, 2006) have argued that the world has changed over time and the theory has not been abreast of changes in culture (Eringa et al., 2015, pp. 188-189). However, Hofstede (2011, p. 22) claims that cultural values are stable over time, and in order to change, it needs a longer era, 50 to 100 years, or a sudden unexpected event.

Hofstede's theory has also received criticisms in terms of data collection. His original research was conducted with an extensive sample of 116 000 IBM engineers and the theory was formulated based on data from that massive survey (Eringa et al., 2015, p. 187). However, the data was collected from a single industry, single multinational corporation, and mainly males participated in a survey (Eringa et al., 2015, p. 187; Reisinger, 2009, p. 147). Hence, it is questioned whether or not it can provide sufficient information on the entire cultural system of countries (Eringa et al., 2015, p. 187). For the reasons mentioned above the framework should only be used as a sort of guide for interpreting the differences and similarities in cultures between the countries (Reisinger, 2009, p. 143).

Hall's theory is an extensively-used theoretical framework for interpreting intercultural communication. However, similarly to Hofstede, Hall's model of low-context and high-context cultures has been criticized for a number of reasons. The theory has been criticized due to bipolarization, overgeneralization, and the lack of a solid empirical foundation (Kittler et al., 2011, p. 67 as cited in Chuang, 2003; Holden, 2002; Starosta & Chen, 2003). Likewise, researchers have argued that the concept is outdated. According to Kittler et al. (2011, p. 67) and Würtz (2006, p. 276), Hall developed his theory decades ago, hence they claim that the concept may not be appropriate any longer in a globalizing world.

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the overview of qualitative research methods used in the present study. It discusses methodological approaches and justifies the methodological choices of the research. The chapter entails four sections: empirical context, semi-structured interviews as data, content analysis, and ethical considerations.

4.1 Empirical context

Finland has become a popular destination for Chinese tourists. China are the fifth-largest source of foreign visitors to Finland and in last the seven years, the number of Chinese overnights increased more than fourfold (Visit Finland, 2018). In particular, the Helsinki metropolitan area and Lapland have attracted Chinese visitors. In 2017, the number of recorded nights spent by Chinese nationals was highest in the Helsinki Metropolitan area, approximately 221,000 (Statistics Finland, 2018). Lapland area came second and recorded nearly 89,000 Chinese overnight stays (Statistics Finland, 2018). The city of Rovaniemi accommodated up to 42,000 of overall Chinese overnights in Lapland (Statistics Finland, 2018). Due to the fact, that Helsinki and Rovaniemi accommodated most of the Chinese tourists in Finland, these localities were chosen as destinations for the present study.

Although Rovaniemi and Helsinki are the most popular destinations in Finland among Chinese tourists, the key attributes which attract Chinese tourists partially varies between the destinations. The city of Rovaniemi is located on the Arctic Circle and it is known for the Northern lights and winter activities, in addition to being known as the capital of Lapland and the home of Santa Claus (Tommasini & Zhou, 2016, p. 205). Lapland is a nature-based tourism destination and its main pull for tourism is the clean and rather exotic nature. According to Tommasini and Zhou (2016, p. 203) the most important attraction for Chinese tourists was natural landscapes in Rovaniemi. Helsinki is the capital city of Finland and it is the main point of entry for most visitors to Finland. According to Kilkki and Daley (2018) Helsinki's main attraction in tourism is "its proximity to nature combined with the intriguing urban culture and event offerings". Helsinki enchants visitors with its diverse culture, architecture, design, and nature sites (Visit Finland,

2018). According Liu (2017, p. 67) the most visited sites for Chinese tourists were Suomenlinna, Helsinki Cathedral, Rock Church, Sibelius Park, and Old Market Hall. Moreover, Liu (2017) points out Chinese tourists often mentioned that they were especially attracted to Sibelius Park and Suomenlinna due to the natural scenery inside the attractions.

The research setting was three to five star hotels located in Helsinki and Rovaniemi. The data collection required considerable efforts, thus the data was collected in two different cities: in Helsinki and in Rovaniemi, which are located 800 kilometers apart from each other. The target hotels were originally intended to be chosen according to the two main criteria. The first criterion was that all hotels should be upscale hotels (four or five stars) given by booking.com ratings system. Because the sample size was limited, the researcher decided to choose only upscale hotels due to the assumption that upscale hotels should have the same kind of quality standards. The second criterion was to choose hotels with a reputation for attracting Chinese guests. Therefore, Chinese tourists should have given at least 50 hotel reviews on booking.com websites to ensure that the target hotels accommodate enough Chinese tourists. However, the interviews were conducted during the peak season, hence many hotel managers declined the interview invitation. As a result, one three-star hotel as well as two hotels with less than 50 hotel reviews from Chinese tourists were included to the study. Nevertheless, the data was noticeably more fruitful due to the versatility of the hotels.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews as data

In qualitative research, interview is the most used data-gathering instrument and it is widely used in conducting field studies (Jamshed, 2014, p. 87; Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 238). The semi-structured interview was selected as the data collection method for this study. According to Qu and Dumay (2011, p. 246), the semi-structured interview involves a series of predetermined but open-ended questions guided by identified themes. Moreover, the semi-structured interview is a guided conversation, which aims to gather individuals' insight information, experience and perception of the research topic. The method was chosen for this study due to the possibility to collect data about the subject within its real-life context. As participants are considered experts of the field, the semi-

structured interview method allowed the researcher to gain long-term field information about the research subject. Besides, the semi-structured interview elicited a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research subject.

Since the researcher did not have former experience with interviews, it was decided to execute a pilot interview. Kvale (2007) suggests that piloting the interview can help to find flaws or limitations within the interview design. The researcher used the pilot interview to pre-test the interview questions and to gain some practice in interviewing. The pilot interview was successfully executed, hence few of the interview questions were rephrased into more a suitable form. The interview contained 14 open-ended interview questions, which were divided into three parts according to the research questions: knowledge about Chinese culture, cultural differences, and service encounters (see Appendix 1 & Appendix 2). All open-ended questions were formulated in a way that participants were given the freedom to express their experiences and opinions in their own words and the interviewer had the opportunity to probe and ask follow-up questions. The interview questions were designed in a such way that they would lead the participants as little as possible.

The data were collected by face-to-face interviews from hotel managers, who worked at a supervisory or managerial level at hotels. The data was gathered between February 2018 and May 2018. The interview invitation was sent to more than 30 hotel managers and it is worth mentioning that only 6 hotel managers agreed to participate in this study. Finding potential participants was time consuming since the researcher personally called all of the hotel managers after sending the written interview invitations. Eventually, six (6) interviews were conducted individually and anonymously at the hotels. The duration of each interview was between 35-45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the native language of the interviewees. Interviews were recorded and transcribed into a written form in the Finnish language forming 48 pages of transcribed text. In the analysis, the transcription was translated into the English language.

4.3 Content analysis

Content analysis was chosen as a data analysis method for this qualitative research. Content analysis can be used to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 107). As its name suggests, content analysis is a method for analyzing the content of communication (Ishiyama & Breuning, 2011, p. 490). Moreover, it allows a researcher to analyze written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Cole 1988, as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 107). Weber (1990, p. 9, as cited in Ishiyama & Breuning, 2011, p. 490) defines content analysis as a “research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text”. However, it must be added that text is not the only content that can be analyzed. In addition, content analysis also enables the investigation of transcripts of oral communications. Content analysis was chosen as the data analysis method due to its strengths in systematically categorizing and summarizing large bodies of texts and the ability to assist in the drawing of conclusions.

According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017, p. 94) content analysis helps to transform transcribed interview texts into a highly organised and concise summary of key results. There are two fundamental ways to create coding systems for content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 107). One is called a deductive approach, which can be used if basing an analysis on a pre-existing theory. The second is called an inductive approach, which can be used if the data itself is a basis of the analysis. (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007.) In this study, the data was analysed by utilising both deductive and inductive approaches. The coding was implemented via the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. The software was useful tool during the data analysis process since the researcher found that the software assisted to code the data, re-organized the data, and helped make sense of data in a systematic way. Besides, Atlas.ti saved a lot of time. The coding was done by simply dragging codes onto the selected piece of data. Most of the codes were developed from existing theory (theory-driven) but several codes emerged from the raw data (data-driven). The final codebook consisted of 31 codes, including 6 data-driven codes.

4.4 Ethical considerations

All researchers are expected to follow the principles of responsible conduct of research. The research can only be ethically acceptable, reliable, and its results can only be credible if the researcher has followed the ethical guidelines for a good research practice. Researchers can violate these ethical guidelines by fabrication (e.g. presenting false results), falsification (e.g. manipulating research materials) or plagiarism (e.g. taking another person's idea or words without giving appropriate credit). (TENK, 2012.) This thesis follows the principles for responsible conduct of research dictated by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. The author has carefully considered ethical issues and followed those aforementioned ethical principles of research throughout the thesis. In this section, the main ethical issues related to data collection is discussed in more details.

When arranging the interviews with hotel managers, ethical issues such as informed consent and voluntary participation were considered. All of the participants were given a cover letter regarding the research (see Appendix 3), which contained all necessary information to make an "informed" decision about participating in the research. The cover letter outlined the purpose of the study, research background, and research methods. At the beginning of each interview, the author requested participants to sign a written consent form (see Appendix 4) to participate in the interviews. The agreement to interview form was used to ensure that the participants clearly understood what they had signed up for. Participants were also informed beforehand that interviews would be recorded for transcription. As the data was exclusively used for this research, after transcription, the recorded data was deleted. In the research process, the collected data was stored in a responsible way, meaning that only the author had access to the data. Participation was completely voluntary; the participants had a right to withdraw at any time. Due to tight work schedules, one of the participants withdraw from the study.

Crow and Wiles (2008) claim that in social research, the main principles for ethical research practice are anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, they suggest that the researchers should ensure that the data they provide have no identifying values that can link the information to participants (Crow & Wiles, 2008). The anonymity of interview

participants is usually taken as an ethical norm, which is embodied internationally in most of the ethical guidelines. As anonymity is considered as an ethical norm, the researcher decided to collect and hold the data anonymously. To protect participants' anonymity, the researcher also decided to maintain corporate anonymity due to the possibility to track the data back to participants. Another reason for corporate anonymity was that the researcher believed that anonymity increases participants willingness to share their insider knowledge and views more openly, hence the hotel managers do not represent the corporations they work for in this research. In data analysis, each participant received a pseudonym to preserve the anonymity of the participants. Each participant was assigned a number for analysis I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, and I6.

5 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings and interpretations of the empirical data. In this empirical analysis, the main aim is to answer to the three research questions: What are the cultural differences between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests? How are these cultural differences reflected in Finnish hotel service encounters? How are Chinese cultural differences considered in Finnish hotel services? The empirical data is analyzed by using qualitative content analysis applying both deductive and inductive coding approaches. As a result, six key themes emerged from the data.

5.1 Finnish egalitarianism in service encounters

According to the findings, Finnish hotel employees' pursuit of egalitarianism seemed to be a trend of thought in hotel service encounters. The data shows that Finnish hotel employees have a strong egalitarian viewpoint that all customers should be treated as equals. Respondents underlined that everyone gets the same level of service regardless of social status, gender, origin or race. One of the respondents illustrates the message as following:

We are not focusing on any specific nationality as a customer group. We don't want to favour Europeans or Asians. That's not the way we want to go. It would be a bit of a dangerous route to just pay attention to Chinese, but not Japanese for example. We don't want to communicate that some customer groups are treated specially. (I4)

The findings supported Hofstede's power distance dimension. Finland is a small power distance culture, which expects and agrees that the power should be shared equally amongst the people (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). The Finnish small power distance tendency appeared from the data due to the preference to deliver egalitarian service. According to Mattila (1999, p. 378) people from small power distance cultures tend to deliver more egalitarian services. As a democratic society, Finns emphasize equality and egalitarianism and believe that every person deserves the same advantages and opportunities (Country comparison). The pursuit of egalitarianism had gone so far that hotel employees' positions were hidden. One of the respondents (I6) explained that their hotel guests do not know in which position a hotel employee works, because it may have an impact on customers' attitude.

According to Wursten et al. (2009, p. 3) large power distance cultures desire to interact with the same rank or a person with authority. However, the data shows that Chinese guests required less authority in service encounters than other nationalities. In fact, respondents noticed that Chinese guests generally only wanted to get in contact with higher authority in customer complaint situations. These complaint situations were typically related with dissatisfaction of the purchased products. One of the respondents (I2) presented an example: “we had an overbooking in one room category and then they wanted to discuss with the manager”. These situations were generally exceptional and even some of the respondents mentioned that they have not faced any customer complaint situations with Chinese guests. According to the NOP World, which is one of the largest market research businesses in the world, the lack of Chinese customer complaints is common. NOP World examined customer attitudes from 30 countries worldwide and the findings illuminated that only 1 per cent of Taiwanese and 4 per cent of Chinese made a customer complaint in the last year.

In large power distance cultures, status is considered very important, sensitive, and obligatory to respect and honour (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). However, Finnish hotel employees did not accept the differences in status. Moreover, several respondents got a bit annoyed when asked how they deliver service to different cultures. They thought that it was so obvious to provide only egalitarian service and they answered the question without hesitation. Nevertheless, Chinese status preferences were noticed in certain hotels. As one respondent stated:

If you compare to Japanese people, they (Japanese) clearly want to be guests at our hotel. They are more humble. Chinese customers feel that they are not really guests, because they paid a good price for the accommodation, and they (Chinese) will get what they want. (I4)

The aforementioned statement can be explained through the Chinese and Japanese power distance gap. According to Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 57) China ranks 80 on the power distance index, which is very high. Japan, on the other hand, ranks 54 on power distance index, which is notably lower than China’s index (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 59). It means that Japan is not as hierarchical a society as China and therefore Japanese prefer to be

treated as guests. In turn, China is a very hierarchical society which desires that service should take place according to social status. According to Mattila (1999, p. 378), Chinese believe that hotel employees have lower social status, which requires them to provide high levels of service. Thus, Chinese do not want to be treated merely as guests; they expect to be treated as deserving of high-quality service. Consequently, Wursten et al. (2009, p. 3) suggest that during service encounters, hotel employees from small power distance cultures should not deliver too egalitarian service and should accept status differences.

Queuing etiquette varies from country to country. Edward T. Hall (1959) argues that queuing reflects the “basic equalitarianism” of Western culture. Finnish cultural values consist of egalitarianism and orderliness thus Finns have a strong queuing culture. Chinese guests’ different approach to queuing culture emerged from the data. One of the respondents explained the difference between Finnish and Chinese queuing cultures: “Finns are more reserved people and they wait for their turn. Chinese usually tend to jump the queue” (I3). Finnish queuing culture is based on the arrangement that everyone gets service according to the order of arrival. It means that if there is a queue, one has to enter at the end of the queue and wait politely for one’s turn. According to respondents, Chinese guests did not necessarily understand that queue jumping is considered impolite and unaccepted behavior in Finnish culture. While Finns expect everyone to queue, few respondents considered that Chinese might not have the queuing system: “we have had these groups with older Chinese, where if they need to ask something, they are coming over despite the queue. So this queuing system in Finland probably does not exist in China” (I6). According to Visit Finland (n.d.), Chinese people do not prefer to queue. In fact, they expect to get services tailored to their habits and queuing cannot be tolerated.

5.2 Chinese travelers as social beings

It is worth to mention interviewees responses when asked to describe their view of Chinese guests. According to respondents’ observation, Chinese guests were represented with following words: *communality, collectivistic, social beings, group travelers, rushed, loud, esteemed and demanding but easy*. Correspondingly, respondents were asked to

explain how they perceive Chinese guests. All respondents' replies referred somehow to collectivism. Responders described Chinese guests as follows:

How we see the Chinese tourists in here, is that they are more often travelling in groups compared to other nationalities. (I5)

Probably the most significant cultural difference is the communality, i.e. we Finns are very individualistic people compared to them. (I2)

Finnish hotel employees have observed that Chinese guests prefer group travel patterns. According to respondents, Chinese often traveled as a part of organized groups or as three generations of an extended family or extended group with many couples and friends. Typically, those extended groups desired to co-accommodated in the same room: "Chinese travel a lot in bigger groups and it is not a problem at all for them to lodge in a small room with eight persons" (I2). Since Chinese are a close-knit community, they tended to do everything together. Respondents explained that Chinese guests literally wanted to experience every part of the trip together. One of the respondents (I3) mentioned that "Chinese extended groups preferred to eat together, they wanted to go out together and they even chose a minivan instead of two separate taxis to spend time together".

The number of Chinese independent travelers was very low in comparison with other customer groups. In fact, respondents have paid attention to a small number of Chinese independent travelers. According to China Luxury Advisors research (2017), up to 35 per cent of Chinese tourists traveled as part of a group in 2017. Group travel behaviour of Asian tourists originates from deep Asian collectivism cultural values. According to Manrai and Manrai (2011, p. 40), collectivistic cultures especially China, Japan and Korea favour traveling in groups. China Luxury Advisors (2017) reveals that in 2017, 77 per cent of Chinese traveled with their spouse and 32 percent traveled with spouse and children. Hartmann (2017) believes that the demand of Chinese family groups and multi-generational family travel is going to rise in the future.

There are cultural differences between collectivistic cultures and individualistic cultures in terms of complaint behaviour. According to Reisinger (2009, p. 150) collectivistic

cultures complain less in order to maintain social harmony. The same findings emerged from the data. All respondents agreed that Chinese guests complained significantly less than average hotel guests. The unwillingness to complaints made the hotel employees ponder the reasons: “I think it is in their culture that they don’t want to show dissatisfaction” (I6). Therefore, Chinese were described as passive customers with low level of interest to complain. According to findings, Chinese have a preference for social conformity and the lack of complaints is considered to be related to Chinese apprehensive attitudes towards complaining, to their preferences for acceptance and to communication barriers. According to Le Claire (1993, p. 83) Chinese do not prefer to complain, because they believe it is useless and inconvenient. Besides, Chinese attempt to avoid embarrassing moments, which could lead to losing face. Consequently, Chinese refrain from complaining behaviour especially when the complaint involves public encounters. Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 113) also agreed that collectivistic cultures attempt to maintain social harmony by avoiding direct confrontations such as complaints.

The data reveals that Chinese guests also gave significantly less feedback compared to other customer groups. The lack of feedback was noticed already in the first interview: “I feel that Chinese are not eager to leave feedback” (I1). As interviews continued, the responses evidently presented that giving feedback seemed to be difficult for Chinese guests. Even if Chinese had problems in some areas e.g. bookings or technical problems, typically Chinese guests tended to ignore those problems. One of the respondents expressed: “It is visible from their culture that they don’t like to leave feedback even afterwards, but they spread the word about their experiences to their fellows.” (I2). Many respondents agreed that Chinese most probably share their negative and positive feedback with friends and relatives via word of mouth (WOM). Hotel employees also pondered if their guests use Chinese electronic WOM platforms to share their feedback online. At the moment, the small amount of feedback comes from booking.com, TripAdvisor, or directly from travel agencies.

The findings suggest that Chinese have a low tendency to give positive or negative feedback. In fact, Chinese tend to avoid any kind of feedback in conversations. Respondents explained that receptionists commonly asked all the customer during check-out: “how did you enjoy the stay with us?”. In most cases, Chinese guests replied neutrally

and negative feedback or other criticism was avoided intensely, especially in face-to-face encounters. According to Aycan et al. (2014, p. 298) collectivistic cultures tend to avoid giving negative feedback to save the employee's face. According to Reisinger (2009, p. 131) preservation of face is a very important Chinese value and causing someone to lose face is regarded as incorrect behaviour. Collectivistic cultures also have a tendency to avoid giving positive feedback due to the notion that the positive feedback may disturb the group harmony. They believe that positive feedback might result in jealousy and bitterness among those who did not receive such feedback (Aycan et al., 2014, p. 298). The lack of Chinese feedback has resulted in a situation that Finnish hotel employees are unaware of Chinese hotel guests' preferences.

5.3 Testing the comfort zone of Chinese and Finns

Finland has a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which tries to avoid unknown situations and follows the rules strictly. China is a low uncertainty avoidance culture, which is comfortable taking risks and prefer less rules. (Country comparison.) These different attitudes towards risk-taking and uncertainty-acceptance have caused tension between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests. In Finland, smoking inside the hotel room is strictly prohibited. Similarly, smoking in front of the main entrance is limited in most of the hotels. However, Chinese guests have not followed the smoking regulations, which has led to tension between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests. One respondent expressed his/her opinion strictly and irritably: "for example take this smoking problem in the hotel area; if smoking is clearly prohibited, you would assume that this prohibition is respected by all the customers" (I3). The statement clearly illustrates a tendency to judge others' behaviour based on our own cultural norms. Finnish people prefer to follow rules and regulations and they do not accept deviant behavior. On the contrary, the Chinese perception of rules is more flexible and deviance from the norm is more easily tolerated (Country comparison).

The difference between Chinese and Finnish uncertainty avoidance was found at service encounters due to willingness to make unfamiliar decisions. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures have a more relaxed attitude and they are more tolerant of risk-taking (Reisinger, 2009, p. 139). Respondents mentioned that their Chinese guests did not need much time

or information in the decision-making process. Finnish hotel employees' way of describing Chinese behaviour with a suspicious tone of voice clarifies that they have a different approach to avoid uncertainty. One of the respondents marveled at the Chinese decision-making process as follows: "they (Chinese) wanted to book safaris and they asked for recommendations, and they immediately booked a reindeer safari for 4 persons that I briefly showed on my screen. I didn't need to explain thoroughly how long it takes or what it includes. Then they also booked another safari without any questions" (I1). The statement illustrates that Chinese have a low preference for avoiding uncertainty. They are comfortable with unclear information and they accept risks. The respondents' statement about Chinese purchasing behaviour "I didn't need to explain thoroughly", shows that Finns expect to get more comprehensive information in the decision-making process. Other respondents also recognized the low uncertainty avoidance of Chinese guests. As one respondent (I2) pointed out, Chinese guests are very open-minded and flexible in their decisions: "a Chinese couple didn't have initial plans for their stay but they wanted to buy a trip to Kiruna (Sweden), simply because they didn't have plans. So, they went to Kiruna the next morning".

When it comes to planning holidays, Chinese tended to be more relaxed than their Western counterparts. The Chinese low-uncertainty avoidance can be seen in the lack of information about the destination. Respondents mentioned that many of their Chinese guests did not have much foreknowledge of the destination. One of the respondents (I4) illustrated the message as follows: "Chinese require more concierge services than Finnish guests. That is probably the biggest difference. They also ask for more information about the environment here in Finland. It seems that they don't gather knowledge before their trip and then they are asking what the voltage is here and what kind of power socket is needed. They don't usually have proper socket with them". Finland is a low uncertainty culture, which tries to reduce uncertainty by planning (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 315). Therefore, the Chinese low tendency of planning in advance amazed Finnish hotel employees. Chinese guests often assumed that Finnish receptionists also provide concierge services to hotel guests. Hence, Chinese guests asked for suggestions and recommendation for where to go, directions to local areas, pre-purchased metro tickets, and even proposed that receptionists go outside with them to show directions.

According to Wang et al. (2008, p. 320) the most common greeting in China is “Chi Fan Le Ma” which means “have you eaten?”. The greeting demonstrates the importance of food for Chinese people. Although China is a low uncertainty avoidance culture, according to all respondents, Chinese strongly avoid uncertainty in terms of food. One respondent explained (I1) that it is very common for Chinese guests to try to cancel their half board reservation in order to go to Chinese restaurants. Similarly, another respondent stated “when it comes to the food, they don’t take risks” (I4). Pollard (2016) agreed that Chinese guests mostly prefer to eat Chinese food. The reason is that Chinese are not used to eating Western food (Wang et al., 2009, p. 323). According to Wang et al. (2009, p. 323), Chinese consider raw vegetables as “unhygienic”, hence Chinese prefer hot dishes and hot drinks. Since, the hotels surveyed did not offer Chinese food, it led to a situation that Chinese entailed their own food at hotel rooms. One respondent (I4) explained: “they borrow platters, knives, and forks because they usually eat what they have bought from the local grocery store in their rooms”.

5.4 Asking for exceptional favors

According to Wursten et al. (2009, p. 3) masculine cultures prefer extra discounts, exceptional favours and a high level of customer service. Chinese high-masculinity culture was noticeable in hotel service encounters in terms of exceptional favors. According to data, Chinese guests expected to get exclusive service. As one respondent pointed out: “They expect good customer service and if they ask to loan a platter and it is not delivered to the room within one minute, they will call to the reception again and ask where the platter is” (I4). As a masculine culture, Chinese believe that hotel employees should bend over backwards to make things happen for the guests (Wursten et al., 2009, p. 3). The pompous Chinese attitude towards Finnish hotel employees caused hilarious reactions amongst Finns. Respondents’ way of expressing Chinese behaviour related to exceptional favours shows the dissenting opinion. As a feminine culture, Finns promote equal rights and equal treatment thus Chinese guests were treated with the same respect as other customer groups. However, it is worth mentioning that in certain hotels, Chinese guests required hardly any favors. Hereby, the findings suggest that the finer the hotel, the more Chinese requested exceptional favours.

Another feature related to highly masculine culture was porter services. Nearly all respondents perceived that Chinese guests particularly favoured porter services such as carrying luggage. Most of the hotels provided porter services at least for peak seasons, but not all hotels. One respondent explained that “they do not provide porter services, which has led to a situation that Chinese guests especially females proposed that receptionists help them with the luggage” (I1). According to Cui and Garcia (2016, pp. 238-239) Chinese women’s behaviour is a result of China’s high-masculinity culture. Chinese gender roles are very traditional: men are breadwinners and women are supposed to play a role which is limited and inferior. This masculine culture along with Confucianism and other ruling philosophies expects people to open doors for women, carry their heavy bags, pay their restaurant bills, and drive the car for them. In masculine cultures, those actions are seen as a sign of politeness. (Cui & Garcia, 2016, pp. 238-239.) Hereby, it could be one reason why Chinese women in particular tend to ask for more porter services at hotels. Since Chinese guests often asked for porter services, Finnish hotel employees felt that porter services do not belong to Finnish service culture and they thought that it is often associated with to more luxurious hotels.

5.5 Dealing with language barriers

The findings of this study imply that the language barrier between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests frequently caused problems. In fact, Chinese travelers were perceived to cause more linguistic problems than their Asian counterparts. The lack of a common language created most of the problems in service encounters, because none of the hotels had Chinese-speaking staff at the front desk. Most of the Chinese travelers who did not have English language skills travelled with a group or with family members. However, the growing number of Chinese free independent travelers encountered language barriers. One respondent explained how they struggled to speak with Chinese guests as follows: “sometimes it feels like it wouldn’t matter if we would speak Finnish or English. They just helplessly look at each other, then they look at us, and finally they decide that they understood enough. The situation is a bit embarrassing because I don’t know what they are trying to ask” (I3).

Respondents perceived that generally Chinese guests' English language levels were very patchy and that the language skills among generations varied widely. According to respondents' observations, younger generations spoke the English language significantly better than older generations. Chinese guests' low level of English language skills resulted in the receiving "limited communication" due to language barriers. Respondents specified that the interaction with Chinese was generally *simpler*. This means that hotel employees tended to use more simplified language with Chinese in order to convey clearer messages. Although responders highlighted that all the challenging customer service encounters with Chinese guests can be solved without a common language, they all agreed that Chinese language skills would increase the level of Chinese hotel guests' satisfaction. Besides, several respondents considered that Chinese inability to communicate in English language might negatively influence their willingness to contact reception.

As there were plenty of service encounters in which Finnish hotel employees were unable to communicate effectively with Chinese, the communication was handled with different communication tools. Respondents revealed that they used technology as a tool to break down language barriers in service encounters. The most common tool was some language translation program such as Google Translator. Respondents highlighted that translators were used frequently. Otherwise, the use of communication tools varied across the hotels. One respondent mentioned that they communicate with their Chinese guests via the WeChat application. The respondent has remarked that WeChat is very functional with Chinese: "they are flattered when we tell them that you can use WeChat to communicate with us and it is usually a positive surprise for them that we really have it" (I2). Another respondent (I5) told that they have translated all necessary information into the Chinese language. The rest of the hotels used more traditional communication tools such as drawing, writing, and pointing. The communication tools were described as compulsory in service encounters for overcoming language barriers. Respondents have recognized that communication tools put hotel employees in a better position to communicate effectively with Chinese guests.

5.6 Interpreting non-verbal cues

According to Pollard (2016), Chinese tourists value non-verbal communication in service encounters. As a high context culture, Chinese focuses more on body language, meanings, and tone of voice rather than just words themselves (Gamsriegler, 2005, p. 4). Chinese non-verbal communication gestures appeared in respondents' interviews. Respondents brought up that Chinese do not always express their gratitude verbally. One respondent has noticed that Chinese guests tend to use hand gestures to *say thank you*. Respondent standpoint is based on the observation: "If everything has gone well, they are waving goodbye to us" (I3). As Chinese guests frequently struggled to communicate verbally with hotel employees, they tended to use non-verbal communication instead. Therefore, the respondent has interpreted the hand gesture as a "thank you wave". The lack of common language was replaced by a body language gesture to convey the message.

As Finnish hotel employees were not too familiar with Chinese non-verbal communication, they delivered the service with a smile due to the belief that smiling is considered to be a universal sign of happiness. However, in some Asian cultures including China, smiling may indicate confusion or embarrassment rather than pleasure. Nonetheless, according to Pollard (2016, p. 11), smiling employees make Chinese guests feel welcome. Similarly, Wang et al. (2008) agreed that Chinese tourists highly appreciate ritualistic behaviour such as smiling and greetings. Several respondents explained as they do not have the knowledge of Chinese customs, they tend to deliver service with a smile. It is a functional method as China is a high-context culture, which pays more attention to how messages are transmitted rather than what the messages themselves contain. For instance, if a hotel employee says, "thank you" without a smile, it might mean less to Chinese than a genuine smile without a verbal expression of "thank you". The old Chinese saying illustrate the importance of smiling to Chinese: "a man without a smiling face must not open a shop" (Pollard 2016, p. 12).

Another non-verbal communication gesture was found in eye contact behaviour. Respondents have recognized that Chinese guests avoided direct eye contact. One respondent (I5) state that "Western people tend to keep eye contact when discussing with someone because they think it is polite; with Chinese it is not the same". Keeping eye

contact with Chinese guests made them feel nervous and uncomfortable. According to Pollard (2016, p. 11), Chinese exhibit less eye contact than Western cultures. Moreover, eye contact is expected in Western service culture and it is considered to be a basic element in social interaction, which shows that a person is interested and engaged in a conversation. In China, however, eye contact is less common and considered to be less appropriate than in Western cultures (Pollard, 2016, p. 11). Hereby, according to respondents' observations, eye contact should be avoided with Chinese guests since they might consider it to be inappropriate or even disrespectful behaviour.

Although several non-verbal communication aspects seemed to be familiar to Finnish hotel employees, there was still a lack of knowledge regarding Chinese non-verbal behaviour. For example, one respondent (I1) wondered if Chinese have some kind of "thanking expressions" like Thai people who put their hands together and bow to each other. According to Pollard (2016), Chinese people do not bow, but they do shake hands and use frequent and friendly nodding, which is a sign of politeness. Hotel employees had not noticed those aforementioned Chinese non-verbal signs. In fact, many respondents stated that they have not concentrated on Chinese non-verbal communication and interpreting the nonverbal cues of Chinese people was unfamiliar to them. Hotel employees have also recognized that Chinese use less body language than their Asian counterparts. The lack of knowledge regarding how Chinese use body language caused Finnish hotel employees to mostly interpret Chinese behaviour verbally.

Finland is a low-context culture, where the communication is transmitted through verbal messages in the way that the spoken words carry most of the meanings (Gamsriegler 2005, p. 3). The Finnish low-context communication style emerged from the data in a way that Finns tended to evaluate Chinese guests' behaviour only verbally. Many respondents mentioned that Chinese do not speak to hotel employees in a linguistically polite way. One respondent (I4) expressed this point: "they are very eager to ask questions, and usually not even in that polite of a way. They just ask and don't thank". The forehead statement indicates that hotel employees evaluate only Chinese verbal behaviour. As a low-context culture, Finns tend to signify politeness with polite words, because non-verbal communication is rarely used. According to Pollard (2016, p. 11) the

words “please” and “thank you” are less used in China than in Western countries. Typically, Chinese express their words with friendly smiles and nods, and they have less usage of these polite words (Pollard, 2016, p. 11) The Chinese tendency towards non-verbal communication makes the non-verbal components at least as important as the verbal components.

6 DISCUSSION

The objective of this present study was to gain an understanding of cross-cultural service encounters between Finnish hotel employees and Chinese guests in a hotel context. To accomplish the objective, the author interviewed six hotel managers. Based on the interviews, six key cultural issues were identified, which significantly impacted Chinese and Finnish cross-cultural service encounters; Finnish egalitarian service style, Chinese complaint behavior, different attitudes towards risks, different service expectations, language barriers, and different communication styles.

Egalitarian service was the baseline practice for Finnish hotel employees. Finns had a strong tendency to pursue egalitarian service, thus they treated all customers evenhandedly. Moreover, Finns were not willing to give any preferential treatment to certain guests over others. Therefore, Finnish hotel employees did not accept status differences. However, China, as a large power distance culture, highly valued hierarchy and preferred to get service according to their own cultural standards. Thus, Chinese wanted to be treated according to their social status and they required higher authority in complaint situations. Although, the power distance gap was significant between Finnish and Chinese, according to respondents, it did not cause serious problems in service situations. Nevertheless, as features from the Chinese large power distance culture were found, the findings of this study suggest that Finnish hotel employees should not deliver too egalitarian service and should accept more status differences in service encounters with Chinese guests.

Chinese varied from other customer groups in term of customer complaint behaviour. The findings reveal that Chinese guests complained significantly less than other customer segments. Likewise, Chinese gave notable less customer feedback than other nationalities. The findings of Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 113) also support that customers from collectivistic cultures tend to avoid embarrassing situations that could lead to losing face. Therefore, Chinese attempt to maintain social harmony by avoiding direct confrontations such as complaints. However, the lack of complaints and customer feedback resulted in a situation where Finnish hotel employees were unaware of Chinese

preferences. Without general feedback from the Chinese guests, employees did not know how to customize services for them. Therefore, the findings suggest that hotel managers should develop easy and accessible routes for Chinese to give feedback that allow Chinese to express their complaints and feedback without revealing them to others.

The different approaches regarding uncertainty avoidance elicited the most emotions between those two counterparts. The findings reveal that Finnish hotel employees were annoyed that Chinese guests did not follow the general hotel regulations (e.g. smoking regulation) and they were bringing outside food and beverages to restaurants. Correspondingly, the Chinese lack of information about the destination and the high preference for concierge services caused extra work for Finnish hotel employees. However, Chinese willingness to take risks made additional sales much easier compared to other customer segments. Chinese guests needed less time and information during the purchasing process. The findings hereby suggest that hotel employees should try to understand Chinese deviant behaviour and provide preferred concierge services and information regarding the destination. Chinese are known as the world's biggest spenders (UNWTO, 2017, p. 2), thus providing preferred services may enable hotels to receive additional sales.

Finns and Chinese tended to focus on different factors when evaluating service quality and satisfaction. As a masculine culture, Chinese preferred to get exceptional favours and exclusive service. Moreover, Chinese were described to have pompous attitudes; they required porter services and they expected to get first-class customer service. In turn, Finnish hotel employees thought that those kinds of service expectations belong to luxury hotels. Nevertheless, the finding showed that people differ in their service quality expectations and it does not make sense to provide the same services to all. The data suggest that hotels should provide porter services to Chinese guests in order to satisfy their service expectations. Likewise, exceptional favours should be offered to completely fulfill the Chinese guests' needs.

Language barriers caused the most problems in service encounters. According to findings, Chinese travelers were remarked to cause more linguistic problems than their Asian

counterparts. The lack of common language often created situations where non-English speaking Chinese guests received “limited communication” due to language barriers. As a result, the inability to overcome language barriers decreased the level of Chinese guests’ service. As hotels did not have Chinese-speaking staff, the communication was handled with the English language or with different communication tools such as Google Translator. The communication tools were described as mandatory methods for overcoming language barriers. The findings suggest, that Finnish hotels should consider hiring Chinese-speaking staff in order to overcome language barriers. The lack of common language has negatively influenced Chinese guests’ willingness to contact reception. Chinese speaking staff would hereby increase the service quality of Chinese guests.

The differences between Finnish and Chinese communication styles emerged in hotel service encounters. China, as a high-context communication culture, tended to value non-verbal communication. However, Finnish hotel employees were not too familiar with Chinese non-verbal communication behaviour. The lack of knowledge regarding how Chinese use non-verbal communication resulted in Finns tending to interpret Chinese behaviour only verbally, as low-context cultures do. The findings suggest that Finnish hotel employees need to learn how to read Chinese non-verbal signs. As Chinese and Finnish communication styles vary significantly, it must be noted that non-verbal communication describes the process of shared signs between people, which goes hand-in-hand with verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is a critical part of the service delivery process, because its elements greatly impact customers’ evaluations of service.

Cultural background has been widely recognized as one of the key factors influencing the behaviour of tourists. (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011; Mattila, 1999). Li et al. (2011) argue that in order to satisfy and meet Chinese tourists’ expectations it requires knowledge of Chinese cultural behavior and a broader understanding of their cultural beliefs. Li et al. (2011) state that Chinese expect to get quality services, respect, and better cultural understanding of their preferences and needs (Li et al., 2011, p. 748). Similarly, Reisinger and Turner (1997, p. 141) argue that the most important attribute to tourists from different

cultural background are hosts who are aware of, understand, and accept the differences between themselves and tourists.

The findings show that Finnish hotel employees were not too familiar with Chinese cultural values, cultural behaviour or customs. In fact, many respondents admitted that their efforts fall short of what it would take to respond to Chinese tourists' cultural requirements and expectations. This finding hereby suggest that hotel companies should consider providing cross-cultural training to hotel employees. According to Ambardar (2013, p. 71), cross-cultural training prepares frontline employees to provide quality service encounters with people from various cultural backgrounds. As Finnish hotel employees faced many challenges when interacting with Chinese guests, cultural training would benefit hotel employees, enabling them to handle culturally-diverse situations in a more appropriate manner. Ambardar (2013, p. 73) stated that cross-cultural training is proven to be an effective way to increase employees' knowledge of different cultural behaviours.

According to the findings, most of the hotel companies did not provide any cross-cultural training to hotel employees. One in six respondents replied that the hotel had provided cross-cultural training exclusively about Chinese tourists. Two of the respondents mentioned that they had provided service culture training, but it was only partly related to different cultures. The rest of the respondents had not received or provided any training in this area. However, the respondents highlighted that cross-cultural training would help hotel employees to understand culturally diverse customers in their daily work. Although hotel managers emphasized the importance of cross-cultural training, they also mentioned that taking into account the different cultures is not among their top priorities. Additionally, most of the hotel managers stated that they do not require any cross-cultural skills when hiring staff. Thus, hotel employees had the responsibility to gain knowledge of other cultures and abilities to work in a multicultural environment.

As most of the hotel employees had not attended any cultural training, their cultural knowledge was based on observations that they had developed through work experience. When asked about Chinese cultural preferences, all respondents underlined the importance of hot water. However, the reasoning behind the action was unknown.

According to Deason (2018), the Chinese custom of drinking hot water goes beyond simple preference. It derives from traditional Chinese medicine; the normal internal body temperature is 37 degrees centigrade, which keeps a smooth blood flow in tune. Chinese avoid drinking cold water, because they believe that the internal body temperature gets interrupted when drinking something cold. Thus, Chinese only prefer to drink hot water. Although, all the hotel managers were aware of this preference, still in some hotels the water kettle was available only at an additional cost. Another mentioned Chinese cultural preference was related to Chinese superstitions. China is a superstitious society, which believes in soothsayers, auspicious numbers, lucky colors, and Feng Shui experts. However, only one hotel had considered Chinese superstitions in hotel services. The respondent (I6) explained that they avoid using the fourth floor, because four is an unlucky number in China. Four is considered an unlucky number due to its pronunciation being similar to the Chinese word for “death”. In turn, eight is a lucky number, which represents a good fortune.

7 CONCLUSION

The Finnish hotel industry has recognized the need to cater to a growing number of Chinese outbound tourists. Several hotels have developed concepts and services specifically intended to enhance the Chinese hotel guest experience. However, in the competition of attracting more Chinese tourists, some hotels were more successful than others. According to the findings, to be a successful competitor in the market, the industry must reflect the requirements of the new customer segment in many aspects of its operations, including services, food, amenities, staffing policies, and cross-cultural training. Further, the role of culture cannot be over-emphasized, because Chinese guests tended to behave according to their culture. It may hereby be concluded that in order to operate successfully with Chinese tourists, cultural issues are a crucial determinant of how hotels should operate.

The remarkable growth of Chinese tourists is forcing the Finnish hotel industry to take a broader view of Chinese cultural requirements and cultural expectations. With the differences in service culture between Asians and Westerners, it is vital for the hotel sector to be aware of the influence of cultural differences on tourists' perception and behaviour. Since Finland is a new destination for Chinese travelers, hoteliers need to be culturally aware and sensitive to the cultural differences between themselves and Chinese tourists and they must learn how to use their cultural knowledge for the benefit of both sides. The knowledge regarding cultural differences can assist in enhancing service delivery approaches, to respond to Chinese culture-specific expectations, and to plan cross-cultural training programs. As the study indicates that Finnish hotel employees were not overly familiar with Chinese cultural preferences, the cross-cultural training would give hotel employees an opportunity to adjust to Chinese cultural behaviours, and to develop communication skills and abilities to help improve their work in multicultural settings. Sizoo et al. (2004) argue that employees with high intercultural sensitivity tend to provide better service and they pay more attention to the needs of customers from other cultures. In achieving this, hotels can establish a competitive advantage in the market and attract more Chinese guests.

The findings of the study illustrate that cultural issues have significant impact on Chinese and Finnish service encounters in the hotel context. Based on the study, several main challenges must be highlighted, which need appropriate improvement in the industry. First, hotel employees frequently struggled to interact efficiently with Chinese tourists due to language barriers and lack of cross-cultural communication skills. The lack of common language and communication styles resulted in Chinese receiving “limited communication” in service encounters. The author hereby recommends hotels to consider cross-cultural training and hiring Chinese-speaking staff in order to overcome language barriers. Second, Chinese guests gave significantly less customer feedback compared to other customer groups. The lack of customer feedback resulted in the situation that hotels were unsure whether Chinese guests were satisfied or dissatisfied with services. The hotels were also left unsure about the general experience that the Chinese guests had with a hotel. Thus, it is crucial that hotel managers create effective methods to collect customer feedback in order to make necessary improvements according to Chinese guests’ preferences. As culturally-diverse Chinese tourists will be the future targets of the Finnish tourism industry, hoteliers should enhance the satisfaction of this new customer group by paying attention to their culturally-determined needs.

It is recognized that this study has several limitations. Firstly, due to time constraints and the time-consuming data collection method, the sample size was limited – six hotel managers were interviewed. A more extensive impression on the phenomenon could have been achieved through interviewing also the Chinese hotel guests in the study. Secondly, because of the single study nature of this research, it must be noted that findings indicate the practices of selected hotels and may not reflect the opinions of the wider population. Moreover, the data was gathered in two Finnish destinations, which also may limit the findings’ generalizability in Finland. Thirdly, only Finnish hotel managers’ views were sought, thus the study is conducted from their perspective, without any Chinese hotel guest being interviewed. Similarly, front-line service employees were not interviewed for the study.

As a direction for further research, the perception of hotel managers can be shifted to Chinese hotel guests’ perceptions. During the interviews, several hotel managers

mentioned that it would be worthwhile to examine the phenomenon also from Chinese guest's point of view. In addition, future studies could benefit from multimethod approaches. Combining both qualitative approaches and quantitative approaches could assist to draw a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and to extend the generalizability of the results to a wider population.

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APPENDIX 1: Haastattelurunko (Interview structure in Finnish)

Kursiivilla kirjoitetut apukysymykset kysytään ainoastaan tilanteissa, jossa haastateltavalla on ollut vaikeuksia vastata pääkysymykseen.

Taustakysymykset

- Sukupuoli ja ikä
- Missä hotellissa työskentelet tällä hetkellä ja mikä on työnkuvasi?
- Kuinka kauan olet ollut töissä kyseisessä hotellissa? Kauanko olet ollut hotellialalla töissä?

KIINALAISEN KULTTUURINTUNTEMUS

1. Kertoisitko mitä teidän hotellissa tiedetään kiinalaisten kulttuurista ja tavoista?

Mitä te tiedätte kiinalaisista? Miten kuvailisitte kiinalaisia? Mitkä ovat mielestänne kiinan kulttuurin erityispiirteitä?

2. Miten mielestäsi kiinalaiset asiakkaat on huomioitu teidän hotellissa?

Oletteko saaneet koulutusta kieleen, kulttuuriin tai tapoihin? Onko hotellissanne esimerkiksi kiinankielisiä opasteita?

KULTTUURIEROT

3. Millaisia kulttuurieroja näet kiinalaisten ja suomalaisten välillä?

Mitä yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia näet suomalaisten ja kiinalaisten välillä? Mitä kulttuurieroja olette kohdanneet asiakaspalvelussa kiinalaisten kanssa? Millä yksittäisillä sanoilla kuvailisit kiinalaisia matkailijoita?

a. Miten kiinalaiset suhtautuvat hotellin henkilökuntaa kohtaan?

Oletteko te mielestänne asiakaspalvelutilanteessa tasavertaisia (kiinalainen ylimielinen)? Miten kiinalaiset puhuttelevat teitä (Madam, Sir/status)? Onko tilanteita, joissa he haluavat esimiehen paikalle? Onko he vaativampia asiakkaita verrattuna muihin asiakasryhmiin? (Power Distance)

b. Miten kiinalaiset yleensä reagoivat odottamattomiin tilanteisiin ja muutoksiin?

Esimerkiksi huone ei ole valmis sisäänkirjautumistilanteessa. Paljonko kiinalaiset tarvitsevat tietoa tehdessään päätöksiä/valintoja esim. hotellipalveluita ostaessa? (Uncertainty Avoidance)

c. Vaativatko kiinalaiset asiakkaat eri asioita asiakaspalvelulta kuin suomalaiset? Esimerkiksi erityiskohtelua, alennuksia, parempaa asiakaspalvelua tai muita etuuksia. (Masculinity-Femininity)

d. Onko kiinalaisille asiakkaille tärkeämpää saada henkilökohtaista asiakaspalvelua kuin suomalaisille? Kertoisitko tästä vähän lyhyesti. (Power distance)

Small talk, palvelua samalta asiakaspalvelijalta.

- e. Millaisissa kokoonpanoissa kiinalaiset matkustavat? Miten kiinalaiset käyttäytyvät palvelutilanteissa, poikkeako se suomalaisten matkailijoiden käyttäytymisestä? (kohtelias) Miten luotte asiakassuhteita kiinalaisiin matkailijoihin, poikkeako se muista asiakasryhmistä? (individualism-collectivism)
- f. Palveletko suomalaisia ja kiinalaisia asiakkaita samalla tavalla vai muuttuuko palvelutyyli, kun asiakas tulee toisesta kulttuurista?

4. Minkälaista kommunikaatio yleensä on kiinalaisten kanssa?

Ymmärrättekö mielestänne hyvin toisianne? Käyttävätkö he elekieltä? Eroako kommunikointi kiinalaisten asiakkaiden kanssa muista asiakasryhmistä? Onko hotellissa kiinantaitoista työntekijää tai osaatteko kiinankielisiä ilmaisia?

PALVELUTILANTEET

5. Kuvailisitko tyypillistä työpäivääsi kiinalaisen asiakkaiden kanssa?

Millaisia palvelutilanteita kohtaat päivittäin kiinalaisten kanssa? Millaisissa asioissa he ottavat yhteyttä vastaanottoon. Esimerkiksi sisään- ja uloskirjautuminen, varausten hoitaminen, hotellipalvelut, palautteen antaminen tai lisäpalveluiden myynti.

6. Kertoisitko onnistuneesta palvelutilanteesta kiinalaisten kanssa?

Mitkä asiat sujuvat hyvin kiinalaisten asiakkaiden kanssa? Kertoisitko palvelutilanteen ilmapiiristä ja ”hengestä”.

7. Kertoisitko epäonnistuneesta palvelutilanteesta kiinalaisten kanssa?

Mitkä asiat ovat menneet pieleen? Onko ollut kiusallisia palvelutilanteita?

8. Missä asioissa koet ymmärtäväsi kiinalaisia asiakkaita?

Mitkä asiat sujuvat hyvin kiinalaisten kanssa ilman väärinkäsityksiä?

9. Missä asioissa et koe ymmärtäväsi kiinalaisia asiakkaita?

Onko sinulla ollut palvelutilanteita, jotka olisivat yllättäneet, ihmetyttäneet tai olleet erikoisia jollain tavalla?

10. Miten työympäristössäsi puhutaan kiinalaisista asiakkaista?

Millainen on ilmapiiri ja henki puhuttaessa kiinalaisista asiakkaista.

11. Mitä mielestäsi hotellin työntekijöiden tulisi tietää kiinalaisesta kulttuurista ja tavoista, jotta he voisivat palvella kiinalaisia asiakkaita paremmin?

KIINALAISTEN MIELTYMYKSET

12. Miten hotellin palveluiden suunnittelussa on otettu huomioon kiinalaiset asiakkaat?

13. Minkälaista positiivista ja negatiivista palautetta olette saaneet kiinalaisilta asiakkailta? Mitä kanavaa kautta palaute yleensä tulee?

14. Verrattuna muihin asiakasryhmiin, millaisia erityistoiveita kiinalaisilla asiakkailla on?

Tuliko teille mieleen vielä muita asioita kiinalaisista asiakkaista tämän haastattelun aikana?

APPENDIX 2: Interview Structure

More specific questions with cursive font are asked only when the respondent have had difficulties to answer the main question.

Background questions

- Gender and age
- Which hotel you work in and what is your job role?
- How long have you worked in this particular hotel? For how long have you worked in the hotel industry?

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHINESE CULTURE

1. Could you describe what facts are known in your hotel about Chinese culture and manners?

What do you know about Chinese people? How would you describe Chinese people and their culture? What are the main characteristics of Chinese culture in your opinion?

2. How the Chinese customers are taken into account in your hotel?

Have you got any training about the Chinese language, culture, or habits by the hotel? Do you have, for example, signboards for Chinese customers in your hotel?

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

3. Could you describe what kind of cultural differences may exist between Chinese and Finnish people?

What commonalities and differences do you see between Chinese and Finnish cultures? What type of cultural differences you have faced in the service encounter with Chinese customers? If you could describe Chinese tourists with single word, what would it be?

- a. How Chinese tourists react to hotel employees? Do you feel that you are treated equally in the service encounter? How do they address you (Position, Status, e.g. Sir, Madam)? Do you have situations where they want to contact your supervisor? Are they more demanding customers compared to other customer groups? (Power Distance)*
- b. How Chinese usually react to unexpected situations or changes? For example, if the room is not ready when they are checking in. How much they require information in order to make decision, e.g. purchasing extra services. (Uncertainty avoidance)*
- c. Do Chinese tourists demand different things in service encounter compared to their Finnish counterparts? For example, special treatments, discounts, better customer service, or other benefits? (Masculinity-Femininity)*
- d. Do you think that Chinese customers would like to have more personal customer service than Finnish customers? Could you elaborate on that? For example, small talk, customer service from same receptionist. (Power Distance)*
- e. What kind of groups Chinese tourists usually travel with? How Chinese tourists behave in service encounter, and does it differ from Finnish tourists' behaviour. How do you build customer relationship with Chinese tourists and does that differ from other customer segments? (Individualism-Collectivism)*

f. Are Finnish and Chinese customers given equal customer service or is there a difference when the customer comes from a different culture?

4. Could you describe how you usually communicate with Chinese customers?

Do you understand each other in your opinion? Do they have to use body language? Does the communication style with Chinese differ from other customer groups? Do you have Chinese speaking employees working in your hotel and/or do you know some Chinese phrases that could help understanding them?

SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

5. Could you describe typical work day with Chinese customers?

What kind of service encounters do you face with Chinese customers daily? What kind of issues do they usually ask in the reception? For example, check-in, check-out, reservation, hotel services, feedback, extra services

6. Could you describe a successful service encounter with Chinese customers?

What are the situations where you and the customer are satisfied with the outcome? How is the atmosphere in those situations?

7. Could you describe an unsuccessful service encounter with Chinese customers?

What are the situations that have gone wrong? Have you had embarrassing service encounters?

8. What are the situations where you feel that you understand Chinese customers?

What are the things that you can handle without misunderstandings?

9. What are the situations where you feel that you do not understand Chinese customers?

Have you had service encounters that would have surprised you or otherwise have been extraordinary?

10. How do you speak about Chinese customers with your colleagues?

How is the atmosphere and mood in those situations?

11. What do hotel employees should know about Chinese culture and manners in order to be able to better serve Chinese customers?

CHINESE PREFERENCES

12. How are Chinese customers taken into account when planning hotel services?

13. What kind of positive and negative feedback do you have received from Chinese customers? How do they usually deliver the feedback? Which feedback channels are they using?

14. Compared to other customer segments, what kind of special requests do Chinese customers have?

Did any other thoughts about Chinese customers come to your mind during this interview?

APPENDIX 3: Saatekirje (Interview Invitation in Finnish)

Arvoisa asiakaspalvelun ammattilainen,

Opiskelen Lapin yliopistossa matkailututkimusta ja teen Pro gradu -tutkielmani suomalaisten asiakaspalvelijoiden ja kiinalaisten matkailijoiden välisestä palvelutilanteista hotelleissa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää kiinalaisten matkailijoiden mieltymykset ja ongelmakohtat hotellien palvelutilanteissa. Tutkimustulosten pohjalta voidaan kehittää hotellien palveluita vastaamaan paremmin kiinalaisten asiakkaiden tarpeita ja toiveita, sekä palvelemaan kiinalaisia matkailijoita heille ominaisella tavalla. Tarkempaa tietoa tutkimuksesta on saatekirjeen lopussa.

Kerään tutkielmaani varten aineistoa eri hotellien vastaanottopäälliköiltä Helsingin ja Rovaniemen alueilta. Haastatteluiden tavoitteena on selvittää millaisia palvelutilanteita suomalaiset asiakaspalvelijat kohtaavat kiinalaisten matkailijoiden kanssa. Osallistuminen tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista ja voitte keskeyttää osallistumisen tutkimukseen missä vaiheessa tahansa. Haastattelut tullaan nauhoittamaan ja tallenteita tullaan käyttämään ainoastaan tutkimustarkoitukseen. Tutkimus noudattaa tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan laatimia vastuullisen tutkimustyön periaatteita. Haastattelut käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja nimettöminä, jolloin yksittäistä vastaajaa ei voi tunnistaa aineistosta. Haastattelun kesto on noin tunnin verran. Osallistujille annetaan kiitokseksi 20 euron arvoinen S-ryhmän lahjakortti.

Pyydän teitä ystävällisesti osallistumaan tutkimukseeni. Teidän panoksenne tämän tutkimuksen kannalta on keskeinen. Vastaan mielelläni kaikkiin tutkimukseen liittyviin kysymyksiin. Parhaiten minut tavoittaa puhelimitse xxx tai sähköpostilla xxx

Tutkimuksen ohjaajana toimii yliopistonlehtori José-Carlos García-Rosell Lapin yliopistosta. Hänet tavoittaa parhaiten puhelimitse xxx tai sähköpostilla xxx. Tutkimus tullaan julkaisemaan internetissä osoitteessa <https://lauda.ulapland.fi>

Ystävällisin terveisin, Pauliina Linnanen

Suomalaisten asiakaspalvelijoiden ja kiinalaisten matkailijoiden väliset palvelutilanteet hotelleissa kulttuurillisesta näkökulmasta

Kiinalaisten matkailijoiden määrä on noussut merkittävästi Suomen matkailussa viime vuosina. Visit Finlandin mukaan, kiinalaisten matkailijoiden määrä kasvoi vuonna 2016 ennätyskelliset 29 prosenttia edelliseen vuoteen verrattuna. Tällä hetkellä kiinalaiset matkailijat muodostavat Suomen viidenneksi suurimman ulkomaalaisen matkailijaryhmän. Suomen hotellisektori on hyötynyt huomattavasti kiinalaisista matkailijoista ja heistä on tullut tärkeä asiakassegmentti monille hotelleille. Sen vuoksi hotellipalveluissa tulisi huomioida entistä paremmin kiinalaiset matkailijat. Suomi on vielä suhteellisen uusi matkailukohde kiinalaisille matkailijoille ja siksi on erityisen tärkeää selvittää millaisia palvelutilanteita kiinalaiset matkailijat kohtaavat suomalaisten majoituspalveluiden tarjoajien kanssa.

Tässä tutkimuksessa käytetään laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää. Laadullinen tutkimus toteutetaan haastattelemalla eri hotellien vastaanottopäälliköitä Helsingin ja Rovaniemen alueilla, koska näillä alueilla majoittuu merkittävä osa Suomeen tulevista kiinalaisista matkailijoista. Haastatteluiden tavoitteena on tutkia vastaanottopäälliköiden havaintoja palvelutilanteista ja kommunikoinnista, sekä millaisia hotellikohtaisia ohjeistuksia on laadittu kiinalaisten matkailijoiden palvelemiseen. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on lisätä ymmärrystä, kuinka palvelutilanteet rakentuvat kiinalaisen matkailijan ja suomalaisen matkailupalvelun tarjoajan välille hotellikontekstissa.

APPENDIX 4: Suostumuskirje haastatteluun (Participants Agreement in Finnish)

Olen Lapin yliopistossa matkailututkimuksen opiskelija ja teen Pro gradu -tutkielmani suomalaisten asiakaspalvelijoiden ja kiinalaisten matkailijoiden välisistä palvelutilanteista hotelleissa. Tutkimuksen ohjaajana ja yhteyshenkilönä toimii yliopistonlehtori José-Carlos García-Rosell Lapin yliopistosta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää kiinalaisten matkailijoiden mieltymykset ja ongelmakohdat hotellien palvelutilanteissa. Tutkimustulokset pohjautuvat haastatteluihin, jotka tullaan julkaisemaan osana lopputyötä.

Allekirjoittamalla tämän kirjeen, annat suostumuksen käyttää haastatteluaineistoa luottamuksellisesti ja yksinomaan tutkimustarkoituksiin. Osallistuminen tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista ja voit keskeyttää osallistumisen tutkimukseen missä vaiheessa tahansa ilmoittamalla alla mainitulle yhteyshenkilölle. Haastattelut tullaan nauhoittamaan ja tallenteita tullaan käyttämään ainoastaan tähän lopputyöhön. Tutkimus noudattaa tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan laatimia vastuullisen tutkimustyön periaatteita. Haastattelut käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja nimettöminä, jolloin yksittäistä vastaajaa ei voi tunnistaa aineistosta.

Yhteyshenkilönä toimii yliopistonlehtori José-Carlos García-Rosell Lapin yliopistosta. Hänet tavoittaa parhaiten puhelimitse x tai sähköpostilla x. Tutkimus tullaan julkaisemaan internetissä osoitteessa <https://lauda.ulapland.fi>

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Pauliina Linnanen

Annan suostumuksen käyttää haastattelun tietoja edellä mainittuun tarkoitukseen.

Allekirjoitus

Päivämäärä

Nimenselvennys