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Introduction

This study is introduced in the following five sections. The first section addresses the research background and identifies an issue, that of service predisposition, that has not been adequately addressed in the existing literature. Through this study the researcher will address this gap, as described in the second section the objective of this project, by adopting the research procedure that is given in the third section. Finally, definitions of terms are given in the fourth section. Finally, the structure of this study is introduced in the fifth section.

Research Background

The internationalization of service is growing at a faster rate than other areas (A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002; Stauss & Mang, 1999). Despite service business becoming increasingly international, there is a lack of research on the international service on employee level (e.g., P. B. Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996). Consequently, we know little about how to help the management in facilitating international employees to provide quality service to their local customers. Concern for service quality is a world-wide issue; however, service quality itself may not be a unitary construct internationally (cf. Feinberg, Ruyter, Trappey, & Lee, 1995; Imrie, Cadogan, & McNaughton, 2002; A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002; Winsted, 1997, 2000a). The value of service quality has been demonstrated on customer repurchase behavior (Brady & Robertson, 2001; Farrell, Souchon, & Durden, 2001) and organizational profitability (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994). Therefore, the service quality is recognized as a critical organizational objective for all organization since all organization involved in service (Levitt, 1974).

The service is distinctive from manufacturing production for the variability, intangibility, inseparability, and customization (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2004). Those properties and the dynamic and iterative nature of service encounters imply that the quality control paradigm for manufacturing, which is characterized as standardization, may not fit into the service production process (McLaughlin, 1996; Shostack, 1987). An alternative to standardization is proposed, that is, alignment between organizational and employee objective (Harrison, 1983). To facilitate employee voluntarily alignment with the organizational objective, it is crucial to understand the employees’ inclination or predisposition toward service, which may hider or facilitate service delivery.

The evaluations of service by customer (i.e., service quality perceived by customer) are mainly determined by the behavioral cues in the service encounter perform by employees during the service encounter (Winsted, 1997, 2000a, 2000b). However, few researchers seem to have explored this idea of employees’ predisposition to offer service.

One exception is the work of Lee-Ross (1999, 2000) to understand the employee’s predisposition to provide service, he developed a customer-centered service predisposition instrument to measure the willingness of employee toward service provision. However, the cross-cultural generalizability of this instrument needs to be verified. By not taking account of the cultural equivalence may lead to the incorrect inference based on the invalidated data (A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002).

One study by N. Johns, Chan and Yeung (2003) suggests that the underlying paradigm of predisposition in Chinese societies may be different from those in the West. In their study (N. Johns et al., 2003), they found that in terms of underlying motives Chinese employee were more inclined, than Western employee, to show personal deference toward their employer rather than establish a relationship with their customer. This hints at the idea that customer-centered concept of service predisposition may not suitable in the Chinese context. The further examination on the cross-cultural construct and factor equivalence (cf. A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002) of service predisposition is needed. Therefore, the focus of this study is on exploring the Chinese service employees’ inclination or predisposition to perform service. The main output of the study will be to develop a service predisposition model grounded in the Chinese context. Moreover, the properties of the indigenous Chinese culture factors, e.g., guanxi, mianzi and jing, may influence the perceptions, behaviors, and the attributions of the customer as well as employee. The second focus of the present study is to understand the impact of Chinese culture on the service predisposition.

It is anticipated that the present study will contribute to the literature in three main ways. First, this is the first significant attempt to systematically examine service behaviors in the Chinese context. This will extend the service quality literature related to Feinberg et al. (1995) and Imrie et al. (2002) via behavioral perspective (Winsted, 1997, 2000a). Second, the findings will reexamine and extend the existing service predisposition research literature (i.e., N. Johns et al., 2003; Lee-Ross, 1999, 2000) by exploring the underlying motives for service provision. Third, the results of the study will respond to call to deepen understanding of services in an international context (A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002). At a managerial level, too, the outputs of this work should enhance our understanding of employee’s inclination or predisposition in order to increase the likelihood of alignment (Harrison, 1983) and, in turn, to increase the organizational effectiveness (Rafaeli, Ziklik, & Doucet, 2008)

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the present study is to develop a service predisposition model grounded in the Chinese context. In order to do this, the following sub-objectives are designed to contribute to the overall objective via the systematic investigation of what, how, and why employees are in an attempt to achieve quality service during encounters. To understand the underlying motives to behaviour, the concrete behavioral cues in the service encounter have to be initially identified. The behavioral cues will be less meaningful without linkage to particular service quality dimension. As a consequence the following specific objectives are proposed:

To understand the perception of customer on what service quality dimension delivered during service encounters in the Chinese context.

To arrive at a set of employees’ service behavioral cues associated with the service quality dimensions in the Chinese context.

To elicit the employee’s underlying motives related to concrete behavioral cues in the Chinese context.

Research Procedure

In order to achieve the research objective, a three-phase research design is proposed. The researcher intends to examine the service predisposition as the underlying motives to perform the behavioral cues in the service encounter that are associated with the service quality of customers. The three-phase research design will be performed in sequence. In the first phase, the service quality perceived by customer will be identified via the focus group discussions and interviews. In the second, the behavioral cues in the service encounter will be generated via the open-end questionnaire, which will be designed according to the service quality dimensions identified in the first phase. In the third, the underlying motives to behavioral cues will be elicited via the questionnaire, which will be designed based on the behavioral cues pool identified in the second phase.

Definition of Terms

In order to facilitate the understanding of the present study, the definitions of service predisposition, service quality, behavioral cues in the service encounter, and motives are briefly introduced as follow:

Service predisposition

Lee-Ross’ (1999, 2000) preliminary research on service predisposition was conducted to measure the willingness of employee to deliver service. In these papers, he defined service predisposition as a form of service attitude. The working definition of the service predisposition is proposed as the underlying motives to perform the behavioral cues in the service encounter that are associated with the service quality of customers.

Service quality

Service quality is described as a customer’s overall assessment and judgment of the offering (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1988; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990).

Behavioral cues in service encounter

In this study, the research follows the narrow definition of service encounter to define it as the dyadic interaction between a customer and a service provider (Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). This research defines the behavioral cues in service encounter as Winsted (1997, 2000a). The actual actions that performed by employee from the perspective of customer.

Motive

One of the aims in this research is to understand the underlying motives to specific behavioral cues in the service encounter. Therefore, the situational or context-specific motives recommended to focus on (Bagozzi, Bergami, & Leone, 2003). The motive in this study is defined as the underlying rationale, or the reason why, the respondent to perform specific behavioral cues in the service encounter.

Structure of thie Study

The thesis is structured into the following parts. The theoretical background and the research gap that the service predisposition has not been adequately addressed in the existing literature is stated in the first section of Chapter 2, Followed by the potential impact of Chinese culture on the service predisposition model is mentioned in the second section of Chapter 2. The three-phase research design will be covered in the Chapter 3. The research subject, data collection and analysis will be detailed introduced.

Literature Review

The framework of this study is developed in the next two sections. The first section addressed the research gap of the generalizability of the existing service predisposition model in the Chinese context. In the second section, a clear discussion is made on the impact of Chinese culture on the service predisposition.

To Develop the Service Predisposition Model in the Chinese Context

The “moment of truth” (Normann, 1984) has become synonymous with the evaluations that occur in a service encounter. It shows that evaluations of service quality only occur during the moment by moment process of customer-business interactions. One of the barriers to achieve the high service quality in encounter is the predisposition of employee. The aim of this section is to pinpoint the gap on existing theoretical background and the research focus of the present study.

Service encounter: where customer and employee interact.

Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault (1990, p. 71) described the service encounter as, “…the moment of interaction between the customer and the firm.” This broad definition encompassed all aspects customer-firm interactions, including those with employee, the physical setting, the technological interface (Bitner, Stephen, & Meuter, 2000; Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000), and other customers (Grove & Fisk, 1997). However, one specific form of the service encounter is often highlighted, that is, the interpersonal service encounter since the person-to-person interaction is recognized as the basic and major element of the offering (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). The interpersonal encounters is defined as, “…the dyadic interaction between a customer and a service provider” (Surprenant & Solomon, 1987, p. 87). The interpersonal encounter is crucial for the highly personal interactive service or people processing service such as consulting service, hairdressing, and medical service (Lovelock, 1983; Lovelock & Jochen, 2007) since the person-to-person interaction (e.g., to response the customer request (Bitner et al., 1990)) is the major distinction. Furthermore, as self-service technology (i.e., customers serve themselves with technological support without server intervention (Meuter et al., 2000)) is developed, most of the routine task are being replaced by IT support systems. However, the interpersonal encounter is still crucial since the tasks that are included within service delivery e.g., handling service failures and exceptions (i.e., flower of service, see Lovelock & Jochen, 2007) are influential on customer evaluations (Meuter et al., 2000; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005). Also as customers’ expectation rise (i.e., the service employee may be expected to accommodate deviations required for service recovery) and the zone of tolerance (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2004) for further mistakes is limited. As a consequence, this reinforces the importance of effective delivery of moments of truth in encounters.

The service encounter has been described as important because it is conceptually linked to the profitability of a service firm. Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, and Schlesinger (1994) use the service-profit chain to demonstrate the causal order of how profitability may be associated with intra-organizational practice via service encounters. In addition, during the interpersonal encounters, the behavioral cues (Bitner et al., 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Winsted, 2000b) and affection expression behavior of employee (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Pugh, 2001) often influence the customer perceived service quality. In addition, the service quality-satisfaction-behavioral intention linkage is widely discussed and validated as a robust cross-national means-end value chain (Brady & Robertson, 2001; Farrell et al., 2001).

Need for development of service predisposition model in the Chinese context

Parasuraman et al. (1985) noted that most service quality deficiencies results from employee-customer encounters. Managing the employee to provide high quality service to satisfy customers is a challenging task because the employee service performance cannot always be standardized (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Service is unique for its variability, intangibility, inseparability, and customization. These properties make it difficult to provide identical service toward each customer during each encounter. For instance, the technical quality, it can be measured in a relatively objective manner. However, how the service is delivered, or how the technical quality is transferred functionally, is relative subjective in the nature (Grönroos, 1984). The subjective assessment or judgment toward functional quality implies that the manufacturing perspective of standardization may not always suitable for service (McLaughlin, 1996; Shostack, 1987).

A central paradigm in manufacturing is standardization that involves focusing manufacturing on delivery of customer defined specification. The standardization perspective also may not fit into the service design. Shostack (1987) argued although service processes can be reduced to step and sequences, service must be considered as interdependent, interactive system, not as disconnected parts and pieces in the manufacture. In this circumstance, the objective of service design is to allow for deviation; the degree of freedom that is needed by employee in the service process.

More specifically, McLaughlin (1996) pinpointed that the variation in service can be categorized as two: unnecessary (special cause, e.g, human error) and inherent (common cause, e.g., the difference on each customer’s individual needs and requests). To establish mass customization service operation system, it is necessary to reduce the unnecessary variability. However, the inherent variation must be understood and managed, but reduced.

The concept of standardization in the service is not only shown in the service flow design, but over the employee’s behaviors that related to the functional quality. However, it does not always lead to positive consequence for employees and customers. For instance, consider the empathy; one of functional quality elements in the five-dimension service quality model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Empathy toward customer can be shown via service behaviors during encounters, such as emotional display (e.g., a smile). The employees is being asked to express the organizationally desired emotional behaviors (i.e., emotional labor) (Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996). However, the organizational control over emotional display in the service encounter may decrease the job satisfaction and increase the emotional exhaustion (i.e., a specific stress-related reaction and it is considered a key component of burnout) (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

From the perspective of the customer, the planning and control over employee emotions behaviors (e.g., smile) during the interpersonal transaction may not necessarily lead to a high level of customer satisfaction and loyalty intentions (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006). The standardization over functional quality may not either create a positive psychological state of employee or satisfy the various needs and requests of customer. That is to say, another solution beyond standardization or control over employee’s behavior is needed since “trying to improve productivity and quality through systems of rules, regulations, checks, and controls is not only costly but ineffective” (Harrison, 1983, p. 211).

One of the alternatives to control is alignment, in other words, the voluntary participation of individual members of the organization to achieve in the larger objective of the organization (Harrison, 1983). Via alignment, people can find opportunity to exhibit their real objective via the organizational objective (Harrison, 1983). However, the problem is that the managers, employees and customer are likely to have different perspectives and priorities about the nature of the service offering (Clark, Johnston, & Shulver, 2000). Service is coproduced by customer and employee. The perspective of customer (e.g., customer perceived service quality or their expectation) is an important source of setting organizational objective However, any inconsistencies between the predisposition of the employee about service performance and organizational objective is liable to influence the service provision. In other words, it is vital to understand the employees’ perspective towards service provision in order to achieve organizational objectives via alignment.

Lee-Ross’ (1999, 2000) preliminary research on service predisposition was carried out to measure the willingness of employee to deliver service. In these papers, he defined service predisposition as a form of service attitude. In that model, six ‘service dimensions’ can lead employees to satisfy with their service provision via cognitive expression in terms of conscious implementation, conscious commitment, and knowledge performance (Lee-Ross, 1999, 2000; Lee-Ross & Pryce, 2005). This service predisposition model emphasizes on the employee’s attitude toward their work and their cognitive interpretation. All of the service dimensions are customer-oriented, including the degree of employees confidence in their knowledge (i.e., competence), their willingness to build close relationship (i.e., affinity), communication clearly and openly (i.e., communication), consider customer’s individual needs (i.e., individual consideration), go beyond job scope (i.e., extra) to satisfying their customer and consider satisfying customer as their responsibility (i.e., disposition).

Indeed, the instability of employee performance is most frequent faced service quality problem (Parasuraman et al., 1985); thus understanding employee, especially their work attitudes shaped by organization or culture, is critical to maintain or increase service quality. There are a large number of similarities between the service predisposition dimensions and customer perceived service quality dimensions (e.g., Parasuraman et al., 1988; Winsted, 2000b). Therefore, it is convenient for management to use this service predisposition instrument for guiding the training program and other human resource practices.

However, there are some limitations of this perspective on service predisposition. Whilst Lee-Ross (1999, 2000) operationalizes a construct for research he fails to give a clear definition of service predisposition in his papers. Additionally, the instrument was developed for evaluating the employee service predisposition. However, the respondents were 60 selected undergraduate students (who had returned from work experience in service organizations) and this group may not reflect the actual employees’ psychometric properties in the workplace (Wong & Law, 2002).

Finally, the cross-cultural generalizability of the model needs to be validated. This model was developed in the western cultural setting. N. Johns et al. (2003) deductively tested the model in a Chinese cultural context. The findings of their exploratory study suggested that the underlying motives of Chinese employee were more inclined to show personal deference towards their employer instead of establishing a relationship with their customers. This suggests that the underlying explanation of motives by Chinese employee may not correspond well to the (Western) customer-oriented service predisposition model developed by Lee-Ross (1999, 2000).

The fundamental difference in the underlying motives of performing service challenges the generalizability of existing service predisposition model (Lee-Ross, 1999, 2000) in the Chinese context to facilitate alignment. Therefore, the primary objective of the present study is to develop a service predisposition model grounded in the Chinese context.

The underlying motives of Chinese employee to provide service are different from the Western (N. Johns et al., 2003). The underlying motives toward service provision can be expressed explicitly in the service behaviors toward customer in the service encounters. These behaviors can be perceived by customer as cues for particular service quality dimension (Winsted, 1997, 2000a, 2000b). Therefore, the working definition of service predisposition is defined as the underlying motives of employee to perform the behavioral cues in the service encounter that are associated with the service quality of customers. To examine the service predisposition in this manner is beneficial to academic as well as practitioners in gaining the comprehensive understanding. In the following section, the existing literature the uniqueness of Chinese context and the service encounter, service quality, behavior cues in the service encounter and the underlying motives is addressed.

The Impact of Chinese Culture on the Service Predisposition Model

Culture is expected to shape one’s value, attitudes, and perceptions (G. Johns & Xie, 1998) since it “is the context in which things happen; out of context, even legal matters lack significance” (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 8). The aim of this section is to introduce the general feature of Chinese culture that are likely to be associated with service predisposition and the relevant service research related to service predisposition in terms of service quality, behavioral cues in the service encounters, and the motives in the Chinese cultural setting.

The indigenous Chinese culture

Although there is a divergence within the Chinese culture, the Chinese culture has apparent properties that distinguish it from others (Bond, 1986; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1991) can be seen as present in Hong Kong, Singapore, China, and Taiwan. Of particular relevance to this study are the concepts associated with Chinese rational orientation (Yau, 1988) such as personal interactions and communication are selected and discussed. Therefore, the concepts of guanxi, mianzi, and jing are introduced.

The guanxi is introduced first. Chinese culture has been described as other-orientation and interdependence (Bond, 1986; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Yau, 1988). The national culture may influence the self-concept of a person. The Chinese tend to have a interdependent view of self that stresses connectedness, social context, and relationships (G. Johns & Xie, 1998). Relationship is an imperfect translation of guanxi. The guanxi is particular important in the Chinese context and is a complex, rich and dynamic indigenous Chinese construct (see Chen & Chen, 2004; Hwang, 1987). Gaunxi is defined as, “…informal, particularistic personal connection between two individuals who are bounded by an implicit psychological contract to follow the social norm of guanxi such as maintaining a long-term relationship, mutual commitment, loyalty, and obligation” (Chen & Chen, 2004, p. 306).

A closer and high quality guanxi is characterized by the mutual trust (Xin & Pearce, 1996) following the self-disclosure and dynamic reciprocity (Chen & Chen, 2004). Three major interpersonal relations are chia-jen (family member), shou-jen (familiar persons such as relatives outside the family, neighbors or people in the same village, friends, colleagues, or classmate), and sheng-jen (mere acquaintances or strangers) (Tsui & Farh, 1997). The service employee may try to build guanxi with their customer via small talk on customers’ and/or employee’s personal backgrounds to identify the underlying guanxi base between them. Addtionally, Xin and Pearce (1996) and Yau (1988) suggested that the guanxi may be built via favors and gift giving toward their customer.

Second, mainzi is another critical Chinese concept. Other-orientated self-concept makes the influence and opinion of others a critical issue. Chinese people tend to avoid shame and try to protect their face (Bond, 1986; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hwang, 1987; Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004; Yau, 1988). Face or mianzi in Chinese is “…an individual’s social position or prestige, gained successfully performing one or more specific social role that are well recognized by others” (Hwang, 1987, p. 960). The protecting mianzi may be shown in the service failure and recovery since the reaction of losing face may be particular important in the negative connotation (G. Johns & Xie, 1998). For instance, one of the service recovery strategies of employee found in Taiwan is to blame the customer (Warden, Tsung-Chi, Chi-Tsun, & Chi-Hsun, 2003) and it may result from protecting employee’s mianzi. The mianzi can also be lost by an individual’s own actions or behaviors as well as how (s)he is expected to behave or be treated by other members (Yau, 1988). That is to say, Chinese people tend to protect not only their own, but others in the group’s mianzi too; especially for those customers who are perceived as worthy recipients of service to correspond to their social status (N. Johns et al., 2003).

Finally, the jing is described as one of the most important concepts of Confucianism (Chan, 2006). These predetermine social roles (e.g., wu lun) and the form relationships should follow to comply with particular social norms, i.e., li or ritual. One of these relationships, ruler/subject, can be extended into the supervisor-employee relationship. The junior partner owes the senior respect and obedience while the latter owes the former protection and consideration (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). That is to say, the predetermined social role is presented in the Chinese have a strong respect for authority (Yau, 1988). Service prevision is described as personal deference toward their employees rather than establishing relationship with customer (N. Johns et al., 2003); however, it is different from the customer-centered service paradigm in the western literature. Moreover, the customer may expect to be treated in accordance with li, which is relative interpersonal interaction service encounter. For instance, the Feinberg et al. (1995) and Imrie et al., (2002) found that the Chinese customer tends to concern more about the interpersonal interaction than the Western.

The impact of Chinese culture on the service predisposition

The impact of the Chinese culture on the service quality, behavioral cues in the service encounter, and the underlying motives, which are the three major components in our working definition, are discussed in the following section.

Service quality in the Chinese context.

Service quality is defined as a customer’s overall assessment and judgment of the offering (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990). It is considered to consist of the five dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1988). With regard to specific service quality dimensions, Grönroos (1984) identify an alternative framework to distinguish the service quality into technical quality and functional quality.

With “technical quality”, the service quality is evaluated as a mere technical output of the production process, or the instrumental performance in the service setting. Thus, technical quality refers to what the customer receives as the outcome of the service encounters, for instance, a meal for the restaurant customer, or a suggested solution of a business consultant. In the light of “functional quality,” the service quality is also evaluated via the process of the production and consumption process, or the how the customer receives the service via service encounters. For instance, the accessibility of a front line employee in a restaurant, or what they say and how they say it during the encounters.

The definitions of service quality from both Grönroos (1984) and Parasuraman et al. (1988) share some commonality. The reliability and tangibles can be considered as technical quality whilst functional quality related to responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Moreover, the functional quality is a primary source of opportunity for differentiation from one firm to another and is also a major distinction between manufacturing and service (Lytle, Hom, & Mokwa, 1998).

Feinberg et al. (1995) examine the (dis-)satisfying factor across Taiwan, US, and Netherlands. Their finding shows that the customer defined service quality is different in different cultural context. Of particular relevance to this study is their finding related to Taiwan. In Taiwan, customer tended to focus on functional quality more in terms of the process by which the good are delivered to the customer, how the individual is treated in the store and the issue of jing seems particularly important in the service delivery (Feinberg et al., 1995; Imrie et al., 2002). For instance, Taiwan respondent recognized polite and friendly as the most important satisfying incidents, followed by being respected (jing) and competent sales people. In contract, the US customer tended to emphasize more on the utility such as good merchandise/what I want and good price.

A similar argument was made by Imrie et al., (2002) that the previous service quality related research does not capture the inter-personal relationship during the service encounter, however, that is a major component in the Chinese cultural setting. They identified three major themes of Confucian relational ethic as sincerity, generosity and courtesy in Taiwan. That is to say, the Taiwanese customer’ focus is on the functional quality more than technical quality.

Behavioral cues in the service encounters.

There is no existing literature particularly focus on this issue. However, there is some cross-cultural evidence to show the behavioral cues in the service encounter is not identical across different cultural settings. Winsted (1997, 2000a) empirically examined the cross-cultural customer perceived behavioral cues in the service encounter from the US and Japan. However, the finding shows even the label of service quality dimensions are identical, the behavioral cues may somewhat be different in the service encounters.

For instance, a new service dimension ‘civility’ surfaced via the factor analysis, which is defined as providing minimally acceptable or civil behavior during service encounters across the two countries (Winsted, 1997). US and Japan share some similar behavioral cues regarding arrogance, bad attitude and rudeness. However, they both have some unique cues. For the civility dimension, the US customers seems to care more about their personal suffering such as interruption (e.g., standing around), ignorance and incorrect service in consumption process. It may reflect some of the individualism culture aspect of US customers who seem to care more about if their personal needs are being considered. The Japanese customers seem to concern more about the expression of the others during service encounter (i.e., employee) in term of abrupt, business only, impatient, rough and no smile.

The cross-cultural difference on behavioral cues is also found on citizenship behavior reseeach. Farh , Earley, & Lin (1997) proposed a five dimension Chinese citizenship behavior scale and compare with the western citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Fetter, 1990). The western organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is not a unitary culture-free construct since the subjective defined OCB may been profoundly influenced by cultural values (Farh et al., 1997; Farh, Zhong, & Organ, 2004). People may make a different interpretation toward a particular behavior in different cultural setting due to the fundamental difference perception shaped by the emic cultural values. The fundamental differences in behavioral cues and its interpretation not only show the difference cultural values, but pinpoint the potential risk for ignoring the construct equivalence, then, may lead to incorrect inference in the cross-cultural study (A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002).

Motives of performing specific service behavioral cues.

N. Johns et al. (2003) conducted a preliminary study of the impact of Chinese cultural values on employee’s willingness to service and adopted the Lee-Ross’ (1999, 2000) service predisposition instrument. There were three main findings from this study. First, one of the major cultural values influence service delivery is protecting face, however, of employee rather than of customer and/or employer. Second, the Chinese employee may provide service according the customer’s status, which may result from the Chinese emic perspective on guanxi. Third, the Chinese employee may seen provide service as personal deference in order to increase or maintain the relationship with employer and customer, rather then solely the relationship with customer (N. Johns et al., 2003).

It is especially critical for the Chinese employees to the demand from the supervisor since their underlying motives of service provision are employer-centered. The different demand from the supervisor may impact of the concrete behavioral cues in the service encounter. Tsai (2001) identifies two more positive emotional display criteria in Taiwan (e.g., asking customers to wait for a while and employees speaking in a rhythmic vocal tone) via interviews with 30 store managers which go beyond the four criteria (greeting, thanking, smiling and establish eye contact) in the Western literature (Rafaeli, 1989; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988).

Methodology

As little theoretical precedent existed for the inductive inquiry into the service predisposition in a Chinese context, therefore, the present study adopted a grounded and interpretive research approach. In the following sections, an exploratory research design was introduced in the first section. In the second and third section, the research subject and instrument design of this study were addressed. The procedure of data collection and analysis was presented in the last two sections, respectively.

Research Design

The objective of this study was to develop a service predisposition model in the Chinese context. In present study, this idea was operationalized as a three-phase research design and shown in the FIGURE 1. The present study systematic explored the service predisposition in term of the service quality dimensions in the service encounters, the relevant behavioral cues, and the underlying motives toward those service behaviors, respectively and sequentially.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Phase one: Identification of service quality dimensions

The objective of the first phase was to identify dimensions of service quality in the Chinese context from the perspective of customers. Although the western literature has made a great contribution on the service quality, the customers’ perception of service quality was somewhat different among different cultural settings (A. M. Smith & Reynolds, 2002). For instance, Imrie et al. (2002) pointed out the existing western service quality dimensions cannot capture the breadth of criteria utilized by Taiwanese consumer. Therefore, to develop these quality dimensions in a Chinese was perceived to be necessary. On one hand, the result of this phase was served as a framework for further generation of relevant behavioral cues. This phase can promote the following collection of the service behavioral cues meaningfully. One the other hand, the researcher can be more familiar with the actual words used by Chinese customer and would be valuable in the grounded analysis of following phase. Additionally, the result of this phase can cross-validate the contribution in the existing literature (Feinberg et al., 1995; Imrie et al., 2002). Winsted (1997, 2000a) also faced a similar issue in defining service quality dimensions in her studies, and therefore the researcher adopted her approach in the present study. The research flow of phase one was shown in FIGURE 2.

FIGURE 2 HERE

Phase two: Generation of critical behavioral cues in the encounters

The objective of this phase was to generate the critical service behavioral cues related in customer’s minds with service quality. This phase was done in a two-substages: behavioral cues generation and cues purification. The specific behavior-based evidence was considered to be practical insightful in terms of understanding what action is actually wanted during encounters (Winsted, 1997, 2000a). Little behavioral information regarding service quality dimensions in the Chinese context existed (Feinberg et al., 1995; Imrie et al., 2002). The findings of this phase were served as a reference point for the employee to elicit their underlying motives.

In the stage of behavioral cue generation, this study followed Winsted’s approach (Winsted, 1997, 2000a), which dealt with a similar situation in identifying the behavioral cues in service encounters. The research flow of behavioral cues generation was presented in FIGURE 3.

FIGURE 3 HERE