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Using Traditional Rituals in Hospitality to Gain Value: A Study on the Impact of Feng Shui

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Abstract

Superstition and the rituals used to support such beliefs remain an important part of Chinese business society. With the advance of globalization and the normalization of many business practices this study explores the importance these rituals continue to play in the contemporary hospitality setting. The paper examines the prominence of Feng Shui in business today in a qualitative study using Chinese restaurants to explore associated business behaviours and perceived value of use. Findings from 20 phenomenological interviews from across four different Asian communities are discussed highlighting the core elements of this ritualistic practice. Results indicate that these practices continue to be used widely, have significant impact in managing the servicescape, and, influence the decisions and behaviours of proprietors. Feng Shui ritual plays an important role in the creation of value for business proprietors who practice it and a conceptual framework on how these rituals provide value is proposed.

Keywords: feng shui, ritual, consumer behavior, servicescape, value

1.0 Introduction

Traditional beliefs and superstitions are an important element in defining the cultural identity of a country or group of people. They have been used for centuries by anthropologists to gain understanding of cultural difference, as well as, to provide insights into the unique behaviours and values of many communities around the world. Superstition remains a crucial part of Chinese business society and with new economic reforms in China today there is a resurgence in the use of these beliefs as restrictions on the population become more relaxed (Tsang 2004).

Feng Shui, or “wind water”, is a traditional Chinese worldview regarding the art of spatial alignment and orientation, and the relationship between humans and their environment. As defined by Skinner (1982 p. 4), Feng Shui is “the art of living in harmony with the land, and deriving the greatest benefit, peace and prosperity from being in the right place at the right time”. Reflecting Daoist cosmology, it is believed that Feng Shui is responsible for health, good luck and prosperity and is deeply entrenched in Chinese social life, having influence on a person from birth, through marriage till death.

The principles of Feng Shui are deeply ingrained in the psyche and culture of many Chinese (Hobson, 1994). Chinese people will often relate success or failure to the dynamics of earth forces (e.g. Feng Shui), as opposed to the cause of human influence (Chen 2007). To produce vibrant Qi (cosmic health), Feng Shui principles assert that sites be favourably oriented and protected from evil influences (sha) by buildings, walls or natural landforms (Guo 2006). As such, Feng Shui connects beliefs of planning, interior design, psychology and common sense (Tsang 2004). As highlighted by Ho and Chuang (2012), Feng Shui is the practice of designing space to create balance and harmony, drawing on the movement and quality of energy, or *qi*, through the environment. Feng Shui can thus be seen as the relationship between people and their surroundings.

While Feng Shui is integral to Chinese culture and society (Wan et al. 2012), scientific inquiry into views of Feng Shui are in their infancy and given the importance of Feng Shui in shaping the contemporary Chinese world, it is pertinent that research across different disciplines investigates how Feng Shui influences Chinese behaviour and thought (Chen 2007). China’s rapid globalisation and increasing dominance in world trade also highlights the importance of considering these traditions as they diffuse into the global market place. Business literature to date has focussed on Feng Shui and issues such as its influence on interior design and customers (Ahmadnia et al. (n.d.); Ho & Chuang 2012); real estate (Wu, Yau, & Lu 2012; Choy, Mak & Ho 2007; Peng, Hsiung & Chen 2012); corporate reputation and image (Chang 2009, Chang & Lii 2010); branding and supernatural beliefs (Chang & Lii 2008; Schmitt & Pan 1994); family business functions (Wall, Preston, & Zhang 2009) and consumer purchase intent (Luk et al. 2012). Poulston and Bennett (2012) explored the relationship between Feng Shui and hotel foyers and other researchers the pertinence of Feng Shui in Asian culture (Hobson 1994, Chen 2007; Wang, Joy & Sherry 2013; Wu 2008). However no studies have deconstructed the Feng Shui ritual and explored the perceived value this ritual provides its users.

Consequently this paper presents findings from a study that deconstructs the Feng Shui ritual, and explores these ritual practices in Chinese restaurants from across four Asian countries. It provides context to restaurant proprietors’ behaviours and examines how these traditional

practices still influence business decisions and assist in creating value for those who practice them.

Given the limited research into Feng Shui practices in business today, the aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how this traditional belief impacts contemporary retail practices. It is proposed that the practice of Feng Shui has permeated global markets and continues to have significant influence in business practices in Asia; and, that these lingering traditions are important in understanding everyday commercial behaviour not only in Asia but in the greater global context.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Ritual

As China emerges as a major economic powerhouse of the future, its traditions and ancient beliefs remain evident and continue to impact on a plethora of business dealings. Superstitions provide many business men and women with a sense of security in their decision making (Tsang 2004) and the behaviours they adopt in following these superstitions are often ritualistic in nature and follow a set script, with a ritualistic performance (Rook 1985).

Many authors have discussed myth in a consumer research context and explored its impact on consumer consumption behaviours (Belk & Costa 1998; Levy 1981 & 1994; Wallendorf & Arnould 1991). In these studies myth is identified as an important symbolic driver of consumer behaviour (Belk & Costa 1998; Levy 1981; Wallendorf & Arnould 1991).

Frye (cited in Stern 1995) also proposes that myths have great relevance in the way we consume products and that advertising structures utilise this extensively. Consequently, myth still holds an extremely symbolic place within the fabric of most cultures. Even today, consumers are often motivated to action because of some underlying myth without giving any real thought to the rationale for that behaviour (Belk & Costa 1998; Ogilvie, Ryan & Pettigrew 2000). In any ritualistic behaviour, underlying myths play an important part in driving behaviours that are not necessarily based on logic but have their source in the myths, rituals and traditions of the culture.

Rook (1985) explores the dynamic of ritual further and believes that ritual is defined by an experience that is composed of a string of events that are conducted in the exact same sequence each time the activity is performed and the same concepts can be extended to many business practices conducted by Chinese entrepreneurs today.

Rook (1985 p253) claims that ritual is characterised by four fundamental and consistent elements. These are the use of ritual artefacts, a ritual script, ritual performances or roles, and a ritual audience. According to Rook, in following the exact same script and order of events, consumers' gain feeling and meaning each time the ritual is acted out. He believes that rituals can be differentiated from behavioural habits in that they are usually group experiences, have dramatic scripts, and/or have more meaning for the individual performing them. They also usually consist of a beginning, middle and an end (Rook 1985 p252).

Rituals are like a social language and communicate large amounts of information about the society and the current codes and practices within it (Arnould, Price & Otnes 1999; Rook 1985). As Rook (1985) notes, ritual provides a structure for the correct way to do things and the feelings that are normally experienced when following the set script. Rituals make

symbolic statements about the social order by dramatising cultural myths and linking the present with the past.

Others have also analysed the elements of ritual and its impact on the individual. Jung (1959) and Freud (1959) believed that rituals aided as a defence against impulsiveness by keeping the subconscious at bay. In so doing, they also helped foster the ego and develop individual identity. The seminal literature (Rook 1985; Erikson 1959) suggests that ritual stems from superstition and a belief in magic and may be linked to feelings of inferiority and isolation. Therefore, it is the ritual that gives meaning and structure to many of the everyday behaviours of business proprietors. Any break or change to this ritual is met with great uncertainty and discomfort, so changes in the ritual process occur slowly and are often met with great resistance (Rook 1985). This may explain why so many Chinese business people still gain comfort from enacting Feng Shui traditions in their daily business activities, as following such ritual scripts removes the uncertainty and mitigates the risk for many who believe and follow these practices. Given the prior research into ritual and consumer behaviour, Rook's (1985) model and definition of ritual is useful in understanding these behaviours in more depth and consequently it is adopted as the framework for this study to analyse Feng Shui rituals.

2.2 Feng Shui in business

Considering that Feng Shui permeates all aspects of Chinese society, there has been relatively minimal scientific inquiry into Feng Shui influence in a business context. A handful of consumer-based studies have emerged in recent years, based on consumer purchase decisions with particular focus on property purchase. Wu, Yau and Lu (2012) use the theory of reasoned action to explain how consumers incorporate Feng Shui principles when considering the purchase of residential property (Wu et al., 2012). In a similar context, Peng, Hsiung and Chen (2012), studied house purchasing in Taiwan and the influence of personality traits on the importance of Feng Shui principles. It was found that superstition and self efficacy have significant impact on an individual's level of concern about Feng Shui (Peng et al. 2012).

Luk et al. (2012) examined what Feng Shui means to consumers and how these meanings affect purchase intentions. They investigated three views of Feng Shui (instrumental, spiritual, minimalist) and found that they differentially affect the intention to make Feng Shui-related purchase. Therefore, marketers need to take consumers' views of Feng Shui seriously (Luk et al. 2012).

Wang, Joy and Sherry (2013) focused on hope as the fundamental offering of Feng Shui. Their research into the use of Feng Shui in homes and offices in Hong Kong investigated the cultural resources on which consumers rely in creating and sustaining hope in their lives. They found that Feng Shui Masters serve as purveyors and co-producers of hope (Wang et al. 2013).

While Feng Shui has significant impact on architecture, furniture and house layout, little attention has been given to the relationship between Feng Shui and consumers' motivation (Ho & Chuang 2012). The principles of Feng Shui not only penetrate personal life, but it is also thought that in a business sense, Feng Shui can assist profits and favourable business activities (Chen 2007). It is thought an environment exuding good qi creates energy, creativity and balance, potentially increasing financial success of the business (Poulston & Bennett

2012) and that fortune and good health follow the gathering of positive qi (Chang & Lii 2010).

It is evident that within Chinese culture, Feng Shui is an important business function, just as other organisational performance functions are. A powerful office or work environment, embodying positive qi, is considered to strengthen the performance and brand image of a firm (Chang & Lii, 2010). As such, Feng Shui has significant influence in Chinese architecture and is often employed to determine business location, office layouts and where cash registers should be located (Wall, Preston & Zhang 2009). As Chang and Lii (2010) discuss, this is very important in Chinese business, as architecture (which is heavily influenced by Feng Shui) can communicate the economic power of a firm or business. It is therefore little wonder that it also plays a significant role in designing harmonious servicescapes (Bitner 1992) within the hospitality sector.

Feng Shui consultation has become a multibillion dollar industry. It is common for the Chinese to consult Feng Shui experts prior to developing a new business (Chen 2007) and it can be argued that Feng Shui experts in Chinese businesses have a role similar to management consultants in western business operations (Chang 2009; Tsang 2004). It has been acknowledged that business investment in Feng Shui consultation is not just about the usefulness of the advice, but it is also a branding exercise. That is, consumers' perceptions of a brand can be influenced by the business taking the principles of Feng Shui seriously (Schmitt & Pan 1994). Chang (2009) discusses how businesses can create a positive reputation via Feng Shui and that the principles of Feng Shui should be combined with modern science in regards to selecting buildings and office design. Corporate reputation reflects stakeholder value judgements (Chang 2009). As Chang (2009) outlines, Feng Shui can thus be used as a marketing tool and may provide value when used within the Chinese restaurant servicescape.

2.3 Servicescape

The term servicescape was originally defined by Bitner (1992) and used to refer to the physical environment and its effect on consumers. Servicescapes are an important component in any hospitality setting and are instrumental in constructing customers' perception and attitudes to a service delivery. Current literature has extended the concept to examine the use of the servicescape as a moderating effect on customer behaviour including emotions, satisfaction and approach avoidance behaviours (Lin & Worthley 2012) while other studies have extended the concept to include the effect the service climate and employee management has on the servicescape (Chang 2016) Whilst a plethora of cross-disciplinary studies have explored the concept of the servicescape from a physical setting basis, there are no studies that explore the effect of ritual on the servicescape. Present literature on Feng Shui to date has focused on the practice of creating equilibrium with the environment and the physical placement of items to create harmony in the hospitality setting not on examining the actual elements of the ritual.

3.0 Methodology

This paper focuses on the ritual of Feng Shui and evaluates how this ritual and the associated behaviours build value for proprietors who practice it.

The study is guided by the following broad research questions:

1. Do ancient traditional rituals influence current day retail practices?
2. What role do superstitions play in contemporary business decision-making?
3. How do business owners evaluate the success of implementing Feng Shui traditional rituals?

The study adopts an interpretivist epistemology and uses a qualitative methodology in the form of phenomenology. As Goulding (1999) claims, these methods take into account “the social, complex, often irrational and sometimes unpredictable nature of consumer behaviour”; and they “... give(s) equal significance to the experiential and meaningful aspects which underpin consumption” (Goulding 1999 p860).

In particular, phenomenological principles explore the essence of a specific phenomenon of interest and its experience on the senses. Central to the phenomenological approach is that there is a core meaning that is mutually understood through the experience of the phenomenon (Patton 1990). Consequently, consumer research studies have used this approach to successfully research issues such as special possessions (Myers 1980) and consumer experiences (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990; McQuarrie & McIntyre 1990).

Existential phenomenological study comprises three important categories (Thompson et al. 1990). These include “intentionality”, “emergent dialogue”, and the “hermeneutic circle” (p 347), and these three elements provide the base for this methodology. Intentionality contends that “lived experience may not always honour standard conceptual boundaries and, therefore, must be understood relative to the specific life-world from which it emerges” (p 347). Existential phenomenology also uses rich, descriptively focused interviews where questions are guided by the participants’ responses. Dialogue should be non-judgmental in nature (Colaizzi 1978; Kvale 1983; Polkinghorne 1989) and through the process of emergent dialogue understanding is gained (Thompson et al. 1990).

The final category is hermeneutic endeavour where constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the data is conducted. Each part of the narrative is examined alone and then, as a whole, with interpretations being continuously revised as more information becomes available. It is a back and forth process (Bleicher 1980; Ricoeur 1976) from which commonalities appear. These commonalities are then grouped or bracketed to become themes. It is by using this approach and focussing on the experiences of participants and exploring how they experience the ritual of Feng Shui, that the research is able to gain insights into the phenomena not offered by a more quantitative approach.

Phenomenology adds another important dimension in that it prevents everyday events such as Feng Shui practices from becoming trivialised and losing their existential significance. “By infusing everyday consumer experiences with a description of lived meaning, this significance can be better understood ...” (Thompson et al. 1990 p371).

3.1 Procedure

Chinese restaurants were selected as the medium for the study as they are plentiful and widely dispersed across the globe. They also represent a uniquely global product with similarities in servicescape enabling differences in Feng Shui practices to be readily evaluated across different countries.

Participants were drawn from retail Chinese restaurants from Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau and China who practice Feng Shui principles and were selected using observation and through existing industry connections in a snowball sample. A total of 20 face-to-face indepth interviews were conducted; three (3) in Singapore, eleven (11) in Beijing and Tianjin and six

(6) in Hong Kong and Macau. In addition to the interviews a range of visual data depicting restaurant servicescapes and Feng Shui artefacts were captured using photographs.

The in-depth interview followed a 'focused' interview format where respondents' feelings, attitudes, perceptions and experiences about Feng Shui were explored (Sampson 1996). This uses a general question outline to guide the interview but still allows for the flexibility to adapt and probe with each interview situation.

Interviews were conducted by two bilingual research team members so that the nuances between languages were captured and understood correctly. Interviews were audio recorded and then translated to English by the interviewers. Audio recordings were then transcribed and the transcripts analysed to identify bracketing, commonalities and emergent themes. Visual data was analysed using content analysis with key themes and semiotic perspectives documented and categorised. Data was then analysed using the hermeneutic circle of constant evaluation where part of the narrative is examined alone and then, as a whole, with interpretations being continuously revised as more information became available. In this back and forth process (Bleicher 1980; Kvale 1983; Ricoeur 1976,) commonalities appeared and were grouped or bracketed to become themes. By using this approach and focussing on the experiences of participants and exploring how they interpret the belief of Feng Shui, the research revealed insights into the phenomena not offered by a more quantitative approach (Thompson 1990; Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1990).

Triangulation of data was confirmed through the use of different data-capture methods (researcher observation, photography and face-to-face interviews) to obtain multiple perspectives and to remove the possible bias from using only a single data source. In addition, the study includes 'analyst triangulation' by consulting with the projects team to confirm the interpretation of findings.

4.0 Results

Findings from the data would indicate that there is still strong use of Feng Shui and its practice is symbolic and ritualised in nature. Of the businesses interviewed 35% were female and 65% male; 47% claimed to be Feng Shui believers, 24% non-believers and the remaining 29% were half believers. Participants' ages ranged from under 30 (18%), 30-40 years (29%), 41-50 years (29%), 51-60 years (18%), with 5% age unknown. Younger respondents were less likely to actively 'believe', however despite these claims they still engaged in Feng Shui ritual behaviours claiming they 'did little harm' and enacted them 'just in case' they added value to their profitability.

Rook's (1985) model of ritual is used to provide context to the ritualised nature of the Feng Shui practices and these are discussed below under this framework. Ritual artefacts, ritual audience, ritual script, and ritual performance were all evident and found to be used in the hope to obtain increased business success and value.

4.1 Ritual artefacts

This study demonstrated a plethora of artefacts used in Feng Shui practices. While many of these artefacts could be considered to be an integral part of creating an authentic Chinese restaurant servicescape, their positioning and use was symbolic, with their existence more than simply facilitating restaurant atmosphere. For example, money toads, symbols of dragons, coins, gold ingots, yellow calcite wealth trees and the waving cat featured heavily in all 20 restaurants. A common theme of abundance was reflected in these items and many of the artefacts used. Artefacts often included symbolic representations of prosperity, for

instance; a boat or rudder to symbolise plain sailing, the gold ingot to depict wealth and the use of gourds carved with peony and carp to represent good health, wealth and peace. An abacus on the wall to help attract and count money along with models and pictures of the Golden Arowana (fish/carp) used to attract wealth, were all considered important representations to improve prosperity. As one respondent discusses, these artefacts have significant representation and are symbolic in their use.

Yes, the abacus, that abacus means if you look at it in Asian days it is about doing the maths, counting the money. So with the abacus on there, it means that there will be money coming. ... it symbolises endless calculation, endless adding, endless whatever. Because it means that money is coming in and I am counting the money every day so on and so forth, endlessly. (Female, Singapore)



Figure 1. Pictures from top left to right. Salt mountain with abacus below; money toad with coin; Golden Arowana; yellow calcite wealth tree.



Figure 2. Pictures left to right. Waving fortune cat; gourd carved with peony and carp.

Another common theme evident from the artefacts was protection. Statues of Guan Gong (God of War) to symbolise courage, integrity and wealth, and Fu Dogs to guard and protect against bad luck were found in and outside restaurants. Similarly, statues of the magical Chi Lin (the Chinese Unicorn) were used to attract good fortune and evade bad luck.



Fig 3. Fu dogs guarding restaurant entrance.

Maintaining positive 'qi' (or energy flow) is central in the practice of Feng Shui and artefacts to facilitate this included mirrors to counter negative energy, chillies hanging from the roof

drying, a cup of water left to purify the atmosphere and a range of amulets to neutralise bad energy created from a nearby rubbish dump.

Respondent: Yeah, the little red chillies there. That's something, but you wont even see it and then some places have some water here and there like a cup of water. ... it's like purifying the atmosphere. It's all about atmosphere.

Interviewer: Is it a kind of special water?

Respondent: No, just normal water that you have from the tap, you just need to change it daily... (Female, Macau)

Feng Shui artefacts were found in all restaurants even when the proprietor claimed to be a non-believer. In many instances the artefacts facilitated creating a more authentic atmosphere and were central to creating the servicescape for the restaurant. Interestingly, proprietors who were non believers and who may not use these artefacts in their businesses would still use them for important occasions as seen in the example below where the fortunate cat is used to bring good fortune to their intimate circle and to protect their loved ones.

I am not superstitious in my home, but as you know my wife is pregnant so in this period of time I will become a little bit superstitious, like people say you can decorate your room even just a little." ...So, because it affects my wife and child, but on the business side I don't believe it and I will take the consequences. (Male, Hong Kong)

4.2 Ritual Script

Numerology and numbers plays a significant part in the practice of Feng Shui. It is believed that destiny can be calculated by taking a persons year, month, day and hour of birth. Each time element is represented by two Chinese characters with the four elements joining to create a group of eight characters called *ba zi* (Tsang 2004). It is believed that through the calculation of the *ba zi* one can gain important knowledge of a person's character and other major aspects of their life such as family, occupation and fortune. Believers of Feng Shui would visit the Feng Shui master during the new year to see how their *ba zi* aligns with the characteristics of the new year. Based on this ritual script of calculating the *ba zi* and then comparing it to the attributes of the new year, business men and women made their decisions. Our studies would support the existence of these scripts with believers each year seeking guidance from the Feng Shui Master on how to approach the year ahead. On advice from the Feng Shui Master they would match or position furniture and artefacts to make the most of the year. The positioning of the furniture needs to be exact and calculated in accordance with the *ba zi* of the owner. As explained in the example below one proprietor elaborates on how the placement of objects needs to match with the owner's *ba zi*. Employees and customers are not considered here, however it would seem from this example that if the owner is happy then there is a flow on effect to staff and patrons.

Respondent: ...it has to focus on the owner of the restaurant. For example, first you need to figure out the zodiac sign of the owner. Never place anything against the owner's zodiac signs. For example mine is dragon and I'll never place anything related to dog. So for me, I'll always place something that would bring me luck rather than against it.

Interviewer: So you mean it always has to comfort the owner first?

Respondent: Yes, because I am the owner here. I have to create atmosphere that I feel comfortable with. (Male, China)

Numbers play an important role in the ritual script of Feng Shui. Ensuring you have an auspicious day to open your business or to begin renovations is an important part of the process. Feng Shui masters guide proprietors on this based on the owner's numerology. Similarly the positioning of statues to promote positive qi is also part of the ritual script that guides the placement of artefacts to maximise prosperity.

Interviewer: When you opened the restaurant would you select a specific time or date?

Respondent: Yes I would definitely. I must select a very good day or proper date for opening the restaurant. Also I would even pay attention to the first customers in my restaurant. Is the customer a female, or a male or a couple. ...it is not good if the first customer is female. The best thing I expect is to have a couple. (Female /Tianjin)

Ritual scripts can also be seen in the idiosyncratic behaviours of proprietors and staff who enact the same ceremonies in the same order as they are associated with great significance. For example, despite the owner being a non-believer his staff insisted on sweeping the floor in a certain way so as not to bring bad luck to the restaurant.

...And some staff told me when we opened the shop, when they first swept the floor they said they wouldn't sweep in the direction of outside the shop, because then they would sweep the money outside. ...They have to sweep inwards! I'm just laughing. But it is believed by the staff, but not by me. But I wont stop them. (Male, Hong Kong)

Similarly some proprietors have daily behaviours that they undertake following the same script every day. In the example below one proprietor would insist on placing five items in the front of the display counter and break matches if a difficult customer entered the restaurant in an effort to be free of the bad luck they had encountered.

Every morning when we start we will make sure that the first row where we place our displays on the display cabinet, will always have five different types, or five of the same type of fruit. It will always be five. ...it can be five baguettes, five pastry. It has to be five. You know, believe it or not, that on certain days when I don't put in the five in front, I find business tends to get really slow, I don't know why. ...well there have been a few times I have done that and its been slow the whole day, but if I put in five right in the beginning, you know in the early morning when I start, things go smoothly. I don't know if this is Feng Shui but it has formed a ritual for me and this is what I always do in the morning.

...when I meet a difficult customer, after that customer is gone away what I do is I'll take out three match sticks and I will break them, throw it away. It's like breaking away the bad luck, this is a difficult customer, I don't want anymore difficult customers for the day. (Female, Singapore)

Another daily practice that offered great symbolism and comfort for one proprietor was the building of her salt mountain. She obtained the artefact on an auspicious date around the time of the Hungry Ghost Festival and as this festival falls on the seventh lunar month she has attributed great significance to this item. She has had the salt mountain for two consecutive years and believes that if she can hold it for another year it will bring an endless supply of salt, sugar and rice. These staples are symbolic of everything one needs to survive and represent endless prosperity. Daily she would build the salt mound in an effort to build her fortune.

Respondent: ...so every time when we see that the salt mountain is dry, we will sprinkle some water on it. After we sprinkle some water, we actually add on some more salt on to the salt mountain. So every time we add on a layer of salt so it becomes or it symbolises continuous adding. So there is more and more and more. In other words, it equates to more and more wealth, and more prosperity coming in. (Female Singapore)

Also of interest were the half believers who despite not consulting with a Feng Shui Master every year would still be sure to position their furniture using Feng Shui principles or acquire Feng Shui artefacts that would supposedly support abundance and wealth. For example, the matching of colours and the use of light to ensure good qi within their restaurants. Many respondents commented on the use of light to create good energy flow and how the restaurant needed to be bright but not glarey. It could be argued that this is just plain common sense and creating comfortable atmospherics but many owners believe it and practice it religiously.

Then of course the other one thing is the pot for the money plant. The colour of the pot must actually match what is known as the eight correctors. Basically the Feng Shui Master would have gone through my date of birth and time of birth and tell me which colour is suitable for me. ... so if I'm lacking fire the colour will be red, if I'm lacking water the colour will be blue or black. (Female Singapore)

4.3 Ritual Performance or Roles

Feng Shui Masters have an important role in legitimising business owners' decisions. They were used by many, including even the nonbelievers, and were perceived to provide benefit. They appeared to act as modern day 'management consultants' in providing guidance to business proprietors in creating an inviting servicescape that created comfortable atmospherics that were congruent with the brand and image the proprietor sought for the restaurant.

Even the 24% of proprietors who claimed not to believe in Feng Shui still consulted with a Feng Shui Master to gain guidance and advice on renovations and positioning of furniture, lighting and placement of artefacts. Interestingly in contrast, all restaurant locations were decided based on business principles such as traffic flow, demographics or ease of access; although once selected, Feng Shui Masters were invited for comment and guidance. Feng Shui Masters when consulted were pragmatic and aware of the need to make the most of an existing location so focused on methods to improve the qi of a facility through the use of self supplied artefacts, colours and positioning of furniture.

I would say currently Feng Shui Master becomes a profession. Some people charge very high price if your business is big. So for your own benefit, you're better to look for Feng Shui Master who are recommended or referred to you. ... Sometimes you can only get to know good Feng Shui Masters by chance. (Male, Beijing)

Feng Shui to me has no special meaning but most restaurants, especially big restaurants, would consider Feng Shui related issues when the restaurants are opened. ... we paid much attention to Feng Shui when these restaurants were opened, we bought in a master to do the fire puja, or, fire offering. ... although communists don't believe in Feng Shui, we still invited the Master to come over to give us some advice. I personally believe in it. I do some activities every 1st and 15 of the lunar calendar. I think it works. If you go around the big restaurants in

Tianjin you will see there is some specially laid out decorations which are advised by the Master. (Male, Tianjin)

This respondent also discussed how they moved the cash register on the advice of the Feng Shui Master and of a secret ceremony performed between the Feng Shui Master and the proprietor. In this restaurant there was something buried under the oven, but the owner did not permit people to speak or discuss it. Referring to it as “it is hidden” a secret ritual performed by the Feng Shui Master to influence the restaurants success.

Other participants spoke of how they would employ a Feng Shui Master for advice on the colour of walls, and the need to paint certain walls certain colours. For example a north sided wall needed to be black while an eastern facing wall needed to be yellow. The FS master would advise on a suitable date to begin renovations, open the restaurant and undertake any major business event as it is believed that every date and time must be chosen correctly.

So I can go anywhere and buy that Feng Shui artefact myself and then bring it back and then I'll ask the Feng Shui Master and say 'Okay, when can I actually place this particular artefact or statue? He will tell me a day, he will give me a day he will give me a time and then I'll just do it. (Male Singapore)

As with previous studies, results indicate that Feng Shui Masters facilitate making hope a marketable commodity (Wang et al. 2013). For example, Feng Shui Masters as businesses in their own right, supply certain artefacts that are required to generate good qi to facilitate this. They sell mirrors, statues and source a range of products that they make a modest mark up on and add to the price of their services thereby providing hope to many business proprietors through their reassurance.

One of the important beliefs of Feng Shui Masters is that any advice they give would be reciprocated either in payment, good deeds or favours. Services were performed very much on a quid-quo-pro basis and often traded for future favours. For example one proprietor spoke of a friend who invited a Feng Shui Master from a different city to come and evaluate his place. He paid all flight tickets and accommodation for the Feng Shui Master and also planned to give the Feng Shui Master Y20,000, but after he had completed his services the Feng Shui Master refused the money and then said, “*just remember.*” Implying that he owed the Feng Shui Master and the debt would be called in at a future date.

... Overall, when you see a Feng Shui Master looking for advice, you have to give something to them. Because when they give you advice, they disclose secrets, which is bad for themselves too. So you have to give something back for their knowledge.

... Sometimes, if you find a good Feng Shui Master, you could treat them as a friend and they would be happy to treat you as a friend too. You all help each other. Sometimes, if they need a book and they can't find it in the city, they may ask you, can you bring me this book from your local bookstore? I will do that. (Male Beijing)

In this way Feng Shui Masters build their bank of favours in a form of currency that they store and claim when required.

4.4 Ritual Audience

The ritual audience consists of the employees and customers. The environment is created to be one of comfort, initially for the proprietor, although it was evident that they were most comfortable when the customers were at ease. An interesting element of this study was the direct influence employees had on the restaurants Feng Shui practices. Given the need to

placate and encourage employees to work well, proprietors who may not necessarily believe in Feng Shui found that they would indulge in certain practices in order to appease the employees and their belief in Feng Shui's influence on success. In the following example the ritual itself is influencing the state of mind of the service staff and creating a more positive servicescape with happy and dedicated staff.

Interviewer: When we entered we saw a very big statue of Guan Gong.

*Respondent: Yes, about the Guan Gong we didn't place there for any religious reasons or religious beliefs. Because Guan Gong represents a big moral ground so we put Guan Gong there to be intangible model for our team for employee and managers. So we want to use the spirit of Guan Gong to unite the whole team.
(Male Beijing)*

Results of this study suggest that Feng Shui is an integral part of creating an authentic servicescape for patrons of Chinese restaurants as they themselves become the ritual audience for the practices that the proprietor and staff enact.

5.0 Discussion

It could be argued that many Feng Shui principles are common sense and form the basis of sensible servicescaping to create the right ambience to attract and put customers at ease. Indeed, many proprietors although claiming not to be strong believers still practiced Feng Shui principles claiming it did 'no harm'. This just in case mentality is borne out in other studies (Tsang 2004, Belk & Costa 1998; Ogilvie et al. 2000) and demonstrates the influence these traditions still have on many business practices.

5.1 New Conceptual Framework

Findings from this study would support previous literature across the dimensions of risk avoidance (Luk et al. 2012) and commodification of hope (Wang et al. 2013). Extending from this work and with the addition of our own findings, we propose a conceptual framework of how the ritual of Feng Shui adds value to its users. (See figure 4). The ritual act of Feng Shui with its artefacts, scripts, performance and audience, drives four interrelated dimensions of commodification, normalisation, authenticity and risk, which we propose lead to the creation of value.

Authenticity

It was evident within this study that Feng Shui rituals were considered important in creating authenticity in the servicescape. Ritual artefacts in particular create strong atmospherics within the restaurant, and the ritual scripts practiced by owners and staff, work to create an environment of cultural authenticity. Whether it is to put the employees, the customer, or the owner at ease; it makes good common sense to be mindful of Feng Shui principles as they are embedded in the cultural framework and psyche of many within the Asian population. Proprietors gained a sense of ease from creating this authentic environment and the positive influence it had on their restaurant brand and reputation.

Normalisation

As business practices become more normalised in a globalised economy it is important to understand these rituals and their influence as they infiltrate the global marketplace. With China developing as a significant economy, understanding its idiosyncracies and the traditional belief structures of this country becomes even more important. Feng Shui rituals and the artefacts, scripts and performance roles they encompass are now played out to a global audience. Artefacts and symbols used in these rituals have become recognised and their

meaning understood and adapted across borders. Consequently, our understanding of what constitutes normalised business behaviour is no longer just western, it needs to consider the wider global market of Asia and embrace these behaviours if businesses hope to be successful. Today, the practice of Feng Shui rituals in Chinese restaurants appears standard practice and regardless of the country the business operates in they are adopted as the norm for many such enterprises.

Risk and Commodification

The Feng Shui ritual alleviates the uncertainty and risk often associated with everyday business decisions. Seeking guidance from a Feng Shui Master and basing your success on the placement of artefacts whilst enacting set scripts on auspicious numbered days, helps ease the stress many business proprietors carry. It is effective in moving the risk and uncertainty of running a business to an uncontrolled higher order, one where they are not accountable for their own business decisions and where market volatility can be explained and rationalised. Whilst at face value this is superstitious behaviour, it does have some similarities with western business methods. Feng Shui Masters have become the modern day management consultant and ease the burden of worry for many restaurant proprietors, just as management consultants legitimise and provide reassurance in business strategies and direction for Western businesses, so too do Feng Shui Masters. As found by (Wang et al. 2013) Feng Shui Masters make hope a marketable commodity. An extremely desirable commodity particularly given the uncertainty associated with much of the hospitality sector in these changing times. It is no wonder such a commodity is readily consumed.

Although further quantitative study is warranted to test this conceptual framework, our results suggest that the ritual itself is producing value through the interrelationship of these four dimensions as depicted in figure 4 (p16).

5.2 Limitations

This study only begins to explore the influence of Feng Shui ritual and the value it offers its users. The qualitative and exploratory nature of the study while deep and rich in nature provides initial guidance in understanding the value traditional rituals such as Feng Shui have in the contemporary hospitality industry. While this study has assisted in understanding the key variables at play, further research to test the robustness of the proposed conceptual framework is warranted in a larger quantitative study to confirm the influence of these variables in driving value.

It would also be interesting to extend this work to Chinese restaurants from other countries and in particular western communities, where Feng Shui practices are not so evident in the cultural framework of the society. Our study suggests that Feng Shui ritual is incorporated despite borders and forms part of the authentic Chinese restaurant experience. Further research to confirm this on a larger scale would be useful in this context.

How Feng Shui Ritual Provides Value

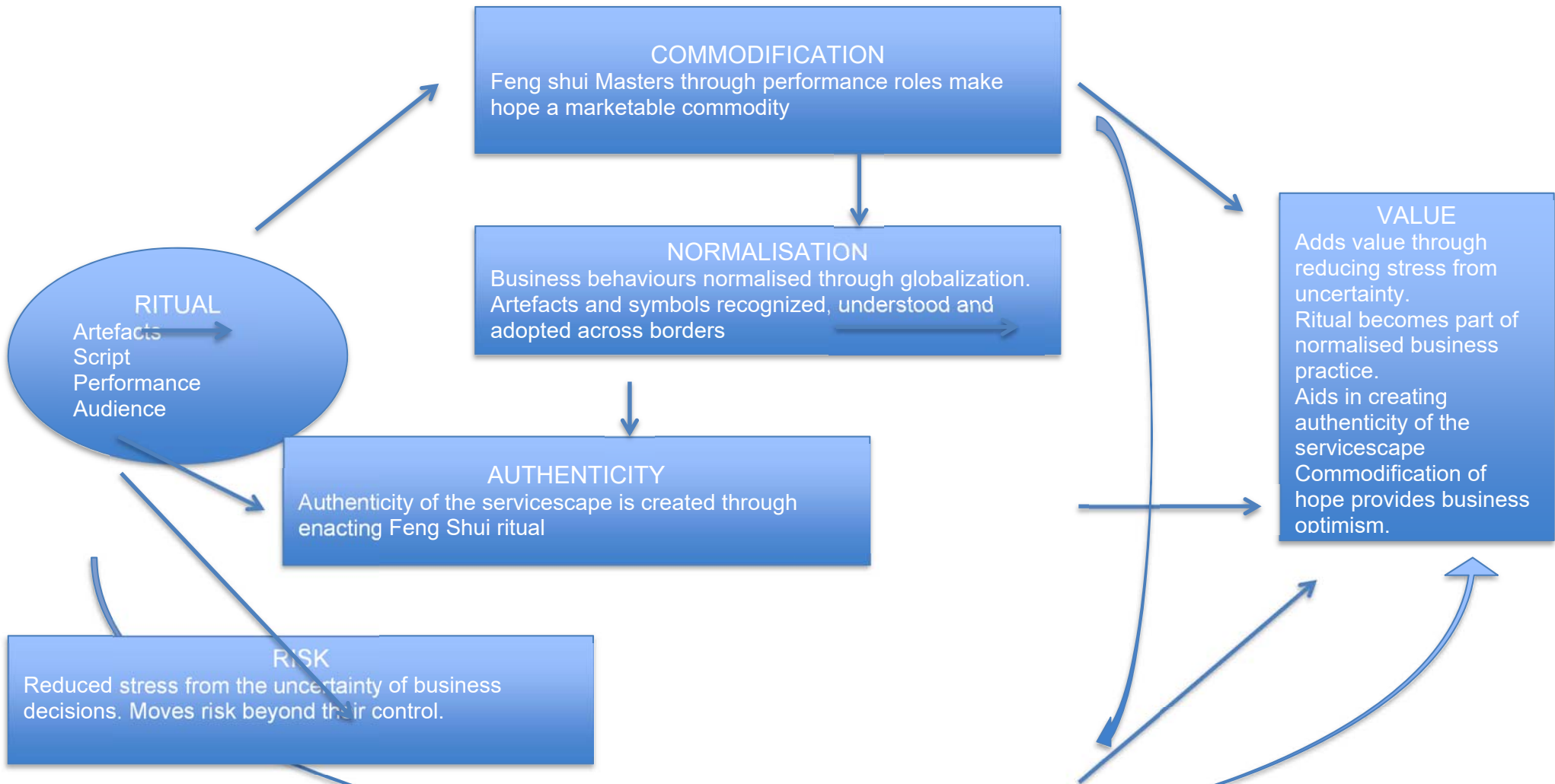


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework of the Impact of Feng Shui Ritual on Business Value

6.0 Conclusion

This paper explores the traditional Chinese belief structures of Feng Shui and examines how within Chinese society today these myths still hold relevance in the decision making of many Chinese businesses. It demonstrates how behaviour and decision making is based on ritualistic practices, and that these follow a script, with set behaviours, artefacts and audience; all enacted in an effort to secure good fortune for those practicing them. In following these traditional rituals, the believer gains a sense of comfort as they shift the risk and uncertainty normally associated with business decision making to others and a power beyond their control. It is in the removal of this uncertainty that they gain reassurance, and through the normalisation of business practices and the adoption of a code of authenticity they gain value.

Whilst all Chinese people do not believe in Feng Shui, the principles underpinning these traditional beliefs are deeply embedded within the psyche and culture of many Asians - the Chinese in particular. These traditions, and their prominence in a globalised marketplace, should not be overlooked when planning and operating businesses in the Asia-Pacific region. The impact of Asian ritualistic traditions and behaviours in Western societies - and Feng Shui in particular - is significant. Consequently, there needs to be a far greater appreciation in the West of the authenticity, hope and value gained by those both practicing these ritualised behaviours and as well as by those exposed to them.

The conceptual model proposed in this paper is significant as it provides a means to understand and quantify the perceived value such cultural practices offer restaurant proprietors. Whilst the cultural importance of Feng Shui is well documented, this study deconstructs the ritual practice and explores how these behaviours drive value to restaurant proprietors. It demonstrates the need for greater understanding of the detail of these practices in order to understand and appreciate the extent of their influence.

Understanding the drivers of value is important as perceptions of brand and restaurant reputation are influenced by the practice of Feng Shui. The need to understand these rituals in more depth therefore seems logical and provides a platform for businesses to create servicescapes that add value to proprietors, employees and customers alike.

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7.0 References

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