

# An Analysis on Cultural Operation & Management for Catering

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**Abstract:** The overall competence of the employed in the catering industry, whether in terms of service concept, knowledge or professional skills, lacks behind the development of the industry. Since the competition remains to be the theme of the market economy, how to establish an unassailable position in the growing market economy which values survival of the fittest is what has been long studied and discussed among catering enterprises. Although catering business belongs to traditional labor-intensive service industry, it is against the backdrop of "demographic dividend" being turned into "talents dividend" that the cultivation of catering talents becomes of great importance. Besides, the trend of branding will be even more intensifying and innovation will certainly serve as a significant approach to the improvement of competitiveness among catering enterprises. As public catering becomes a main current in today's catering business — an accurate market positioning and food dishes get to be more exquisite and diversified with health elements taken into top priority, brand power stands to be the recipe for winning the competition. Moreover, the strategy of enterprises development through culture is an irreversible trend in modern catering operation and management. Furthermore, the education and artistic cultivation serve as core competence of modern catering enterprises and the employed.

**Keywords:** Catering management; Aesthetic experience; Culture cultivation; Enterprises development through culture

## 1. Introduction

The culinary scene in China is booming thanks to the rapid economic growth and the remarkable improvement of people's living standard. The catering related sales saw an excess of 3 trillion RMB with compound annual growth rate reaching 10.7% by 2015. The catering business in China has been in rapid growth with strong development momentum and broad prospect<sup>[1]</sup>. The growing size of the catering industry and expanding scope of business make it become one of the fastest growing industries with biggest increase in domestic market. The Chinese food culture embodied in an old Chinese saying that "food is god for the people" is the internal drive for the enduring Chinese catering industry.

In recent years, catering market becomes so increasingly competitive along with the booming industry that catering enterprises are in operation difficulty just like "walking on thin ice". The average net profit rate of catering enterprises falls markedly to around 10% and bankruptcy rate continues to increase due to skill shortage and employment problems. The operation difficulty is analyzed to be caused by soaring cost of raw materials and labor, tax burden, increasingly fierce competition (reflected in the increase of catering enterprises and foreign companies) due to low threshold to the industry, upgrade of price war led by homogeneity competition, and lack of human resources resulting from traditional adverse attitudes towards catering business. As the era of low cost materials

is over, unbridled competition through low cost war will not work. Plus, consumers' demand for distinct features and diversity in catering business, their attention to aesthetic preference rather than just flavor of dishes and call for higher aesthetic experience and curiosity in different food cultures all greatly advance the transformation and upgrading of management of catering business.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2. Enterprises Development Through Culture—Irreversible Trend in Modern Catering Management

Mr. YU Guangyuan, a renowned Chinese economist believes that economic growth boils down to cultural development. Culture is like the roots of a tree and economy is leaves. For a tree to grow luxuriant, its roots must run deep and strong. It is increasingly recognized that only restaurants with culture and good taste can survive in the market. Thus restaurant branding embodied with culture and unique operation philosophy becomes the top priority in terms of management concern, making many restaurants hold high the banner of "Enterprises development through culture". As a result, restaurants with unique features and characteristics are quietly thriving. This is particularly and perfectly applied into themed restaurants, which only have appeared in recent years. In such themed restaurants, the design, functional layout, decoration style and even signature dishes, service and management idea all reflect certain cultural connotations and their distinctive features.

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## 2.1 Enlightenment on Modern Catering Operation and Management from Maslow's Theory on Hierarchy of Needs

Besides, it is also of importance to master some necessary knowledge of psychology. To understand customers' psychological activities so as to provide more targeted service for customers, who will as a result get spiritual satisfaction. It turns out that providing psychological service to consumers is far more important than functional services.<sup>[3]</sup>

The theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs attaches great significance to the study of people's dietary consumption. Therefore, the theory must be applied as guidance for modern catering management and service.

Enlightenment I: since dietary consumption is food-based, consumers' physiological needs should be first satisfied. Delicious food along with clean, elegant, relaxing and pleasant surroundings is people's direct need in their dietary consumption.

Enlightenment II: people's direct requirement for food as only the basic need or the lowest level is fulfilled before moving on to more advanced needs, which include to communicate with the waiter or waitress at table so as to enhance mutual understanding or to get respect from the service staffs, thus progressing up their needs to appreciate the beauty of food and to show their talents through dining, which are consumers' indirect and psychological needs.

Enlightenment III: although the current dining activity is still mainly for fulfillment of people's basic needs, consumers still can get other needs satisfied and get their needs furthered up during dining time since dining (especially the case when dining at fancy restaurants) itself is a kind of social activity. Thus dining product, with materials and spiritual aspects combined, is special commodity perfectly integrating food with spiritual aspect. Dining product includes food and such labor service as cooking skills, service attitude and skills, surroundings and dining air. It can not only satisfy consumers' material and physiological requirements but also their psychological, mental or emotional needs. That is to say, dining materials provides consumers with the need for food, water, nutrition and other direct physiological aspects, while the dining service related is mainly to fulfill customers' indirect needs for sense of security, ability to control, trust, sense of convenience and status and self-satisfaction, etc.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2.2 Catering Operation and Management-Cornerstone for Prosperity of Modern Catering Enterprises

Dining itself is a kind of culture and lifestyle, and also a

process for cultural communication, where diners are not simply on the sideline, but actually take part in and help to promote. Quite a few endangered folk arts and crafts or traditional food or culture regains people's care and attention resulting from a strong economy and improvement of people's awareness on culture protection. Dining creativity refers to a business approach that is more attractive to diners since common dishes are packaged in an artistic, cultural, natural or other esthetic ways after being integrated with various forms.

Catering Culture is a broad concept. What and how to eat, eating purpose and result, and eating concept, preference and etiquette all fall into this category, which runs through enterprise management and dining in an all-round way.

### 2.2.1 Cuisine Culture

It is the basis of catering culture, because only with food are people able to enjoy catering culture. Chinese food culture has a long history with eight major recognized cuisines and each cuisine covering a vast region. For example, an exquisite Qiehe (a course made of fried eggplant with meat stuffing) only serves as a common dish but will be much expensive and rich in cultural connotation when placed in the Honglou banquet (originally from *A Dream of the Red Mansions*, a vernacular novel wrote by CAO Xueqin of the Qing Dynasty).

### 2.2.2 Restaurant Culture

It belongs to the environmental culture. The decoction, layout, style and preference of a restaurant are the first impression consumers will get and are surely unforgettable. Take the Rainforest Café as an example.<sup>[5]</sup> The Rainforest Café shows a culture of embracing the nature. It is designed to recreate the sights and sounds of the luxuriant forest, so that people may feel that they are in a banquet held in a pristine rainforest.

Restaurant culture is also a kind of social culture, and is an overall refection of catering culture. It shows the highest cultural level that an enterprise can get. For example, "Man Han Quan Xi" (a Royal Feast of Complete Manchu-Han Courses) represents the delicacies of Man style and Han style; "Suiyuan Cuisine" (government food) reflects typical culture of the Qing Dynasty; "Honglou Banquet" represents Redology, any study concerning *A Dream of the Red Mansions*.

### 2.2.3 Service Culture

The culture is about people, including the waiter or waitress, who provides service to consumers as the "ambassador" of a restaurant. Their clothing, service manner, attitude and disposition combined reflect the image of the restaurant. They provide service to consumers in order to create an easy and pleasant eating environment.

### 2.2.4 Marketing Culture

It is a kind of corporate culture, a reflection of a company's business idea, principal, characteristics and marketing strategy and approach, etc. It is an important method for the company to get packaged and promoted so that to win the market.

### 2.2.5 Aesthetic Experience during Dining

Dining is an all-round aesthetic activity. The service staff is employed to make full use of their vivid language to spread knowledge and aesthetic information to customers who usually have various aesthetic preferences so that each one of them can enjoy the dining. Furthermore, because the service staffs themselves are customers' aesthetic objects, they should use their aesthetic knowledge to guide their personal grooming and demeanor. Otherwise, when the service staffs know nothing about psychology and aesthetics, or are unable to skillfully command their related knowledge, to provide quality service to customers is nothing but an empty promise.

Dining is an all-round aesthetic activity including beauty seeking, appreciation and enjoyment. The aesthetic features are fully embodied in Chinese cuisine with variety in its color, aroma, flavor, layout and design, and articles of plate, as well as beautiful dish names, seasonal materials and customized recipes for fitness purpose.

Human's nature turns cooking into a kind of art and food into culture. As people's living standard and education increasingly improve, there is a growing strong will to pursue beauty. In traditional aesthetics, beauty seems to be only in pure arts such as music, painting and Chinese opera. While with people's changing attitudes towards life, beauty becomes an integral part of people's daily life. The Chinese nation has always throughout its history attached great importance to the pursuit of beauty of food, detailed in the food aroma, layout, cutting, color, sound, decoration and carving, and plate arrangement. In the course of their pursuit, Chinese people gradually develop their distinctive cooking skills and form their unique value and attitude towards beauty. Moreover, thanks to the improving living standard, people are furthering up their food esthetic level, thus having various demands over food cooking and design in their catering consumption. Thereby consumers can be more highly involved in beauty and art.

### 2.2.6 Catering Management with Characteristics

Modern catering, based on the traditional catering mode, is functionally integrated with health concept and more entertaining activities for consumers' participation, leisure and experience. For example it's integration with food therapy, tea and wine culture, art performance, music, sports, calligraphy and painting is quite natural. Besides

contributing to the service features of catering enterprises, such kind of catering related activities endow the enterprises with new functions for social communication, business negotiation and communal reconnection with friends and families, thus bringing a brand new development opportunity for catering enterprises.

The integration of various catering cultures offers a subtle cuisine blend between the ancient and the modern flavor, the Chinese and the western taste, and the southern and the northern preference. China, in particular, sees a rapid blend of its foods from different regions, like Sichuan food heading for the east and Cantonese cuisine being catered to the northern taste. In general, it is a fresh experience that all kinds of flavors whether exotic or regional can be tried at one place.<sup>[6]</sup>

## 3. A List of Several Approaches to Restaurants Development Through Culture

### 3.1 Selection of Themed Restaurants

People going to restaurant are not only just for eating, but for beauty appreciation and spiritual enjoyment, which makes it critical that the restaurant is designed with distinct characteristics. We may have received a sneak preview of that when some restaurants with distinct features, clear themes and curious decoration enjoy great popularity amount consumers, like "the Underwater World", "the Donghai Fishing Village", and "the Rainforest Cafe".

#### 3.1.1 Cultural Connation as Theme

Those unique and distinct cultural heritages can be found all over this splendid world. As long as the local cultural heritage can be appropriately and sophisticatedly developed, we surely can get unexpected rewards. Take an example from "Peach Garden Hall" of Garden Hotel Guangzhou, the name of which is from a Chinese classic—Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Entering the hotel, we can feel its luxury, fascination and glamour for its old-fashioned decoration, including antique lanterns with color painting, elegant Ming style chairs, and the three famous classic figures who took oath in the Peach Garden in the and painted on wood pillars and partitions like that of ancient temple. And customers will feel more so when seeing the hotel waitress dressed in golden velvet cheongsam.

#### 3.1.2 Surrounding Features as Theme

Under the theme, the restaurant is designed as a place with distinctive features, which make customers feel the special culture and atmosphere during their dining time. For example, "the Mongolia Restaurant", "the Cave House", "the Sky Restaurant", "the Ocean World" and "the Grand Shanghai Restaurant", all of which are designed with cer-

tain outstanding environment, whether in an old-fashioned way or in vintage style.

### 3.1.3 Special Emotional Bond as Theme

Restaurants in this category are decorated with special surroundings to heighten the senses so that customers are emotionally involved. For example, "the Zhiqing Restaurant" (Zhiqing refers to the educated urban youths in the 1960s who were sent to work and live in the countryside.) provides a gathering place for local Zhiqing; "the Laowuhang Bar" targets demobilized servicemen as its customers; "the Lover Restaurant" mainly serves the lovers.

### 3.1.4 High-Tech as Theme

If consumers are looking for something further afield and exciting, restaurants with high-tech is usually a good choice. Restaurants like "the Sci-Fi Restaurant", "the Space Restaurant", "the Undersea Restaurant" and "the Poetic Restaurant" all fall into this part.

### 3.1.5 Interest and Hobby as Theme

Restaurants in this category are usually designed with the theme of interests or hobbies of certain group of people, such as "the Football Restaurant" and "the Hard Rock Cafe".

## 3.2 Star Attraction of Restaurant

It is a truth that universally acknowledges that a successful restaurant must have its own signature dish. Quanjude known for Peking roast duck, Donglaishun's lamb hot pot, Taian Throne Hotel with its famous dish Man-Han Banquet enjoy great popularity in China even all around the world because of their uniqueness. The so-called "star attraction" refers to certain dish, recipe or customer service of a restaurant are peculiar to it or far better than its peers. The star attraction helps to improve the reputation and popularity of the restaurant, and yet only a dish with special taste can be called the signature of a restaurant. As for the name of a class dish, it has become a default setting to continue to use the name of generations with legends, such as "Longhudou" (the Fight between a Dragon and a Tiger), the famous dish in Guangdong Province, "Mapo Tofu" (Tofu made by woman with freckles) in Sichuan Food, "Fotiaoqiang" (Buddha Jumps over the Wall), one of Fujian cuisine, and "Shizitou" (Lion's Head) in Huaiyang dish.

A restaurant open to the public should make its menu readable and understandable. While some unusually named dishes can be quite successful if these names are given further explanation or extra recommendations at their appearance on the menu labeled with "Chef's Choice" or "Order for Good Luck" and if the aesthetic standard or catering culture behind such dishes conforms to that of customers.

The basic principal of developing creative dishes: to draw from the past while creating new things; to draw

from foreign achievements while weaving in traditional Chinese culture; to strike a balance between cooked food and light refreshments; to change cooking materials or texture of food; and to embark on new forms of cooking so that to be a dark horse among peers.

## 3.3 Promotion of Catering Culture

### 3.3.1 Transparent Kitchen

The all-glass kitchens are the choice of many modern restaurants for popularity. It falls into the category of environmental promotion. Eschewing the tradition of the dining hall in front and the kitchen at the back, such modern restaurants is designed with open kitchen to make all of the chopping and assembling of food take place in full view of customers for their supervision so as to earn their trust and satisfaction.

### 3.3.2 Ordering Dishes on TV

After diners order dishes, customers can watch the chefs do their cooking thing on TV at the dining hall so that they can supervise the whole cooking process whilst enjoy the chefs' fascinating show.

Diners may also designate certain chef in a way similar to requesting a song from repertory offered for watching or learning his cooking techniques. When a diner himself is good at cooking and has a desire to roll out his skills, he is welcomed to the kitchen with his cooking televised to the dining hall, which add more fun for his companions whether friends or families.

### 3.3.3 Promotional Strategies on Service

Newspapers, magazines, books and other videos can be put in the restaurant for customers' reading and watching use. Some restaurants are even decorated like libraries or exhibitions for calligraphy or antiques, which hold great appeal for customers from the arts and academia or in the press. The promotion through service is designed for customers who are into culture and for soul inspiration. The attempt can be made, in the name of knowledge sharing, to promote restaurants.

Some restaurants also use the performance of bands or singers, piano, dancing, live broadcast, karaoke, cooking show, tea making, wine tasting and other forms to promote themselves. This kind of activities should follow the trend and give customers visual stimulus so as to meet their psychological needs and attract more customers.

### 3.3.4 Gourmet Festival

The Gourmet Festival plays a big role in enriching modern catering culture, attracting customers and building company reputation. As customers increasingly focus the culture behind the food rather than the food itself, catering enterprises should organize various kinds of culture-relat-

ed gourmet festivals, which require the organizer to get culture fully embodied in activity arrangement, decoration, promotion and market development, and eventually for a feast of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and spiritual satisfaction. Besides, enterprises may organize lectures or entertaining activities with various cultures involved so as to realize the goal of market development and brand building through culture.

Catering enterprises may also take advantage of resources from all walks of life. Take the food festival with the theme of folk snacks as an example. The enterprises may invite local folk artists, folklorists or other professionals as "wisdom of outer brain" for more cultural depth in the food festival. In addition, when it is getting more creative for folk customs and cultural festivals (local tourism festival and cultural day, etc.), restaurants may cooperate with local governments through organizing various food festivals as a sub-program in the celebration of such folk customs and cultural festivals.

#### 4. Conclusion

Customers' consumption for aesthetic preference rather than just for food flavor is making the modern catering business. Catering operation and management exerts direct influence not only on the economic benefit of a restaurant, but more importantly its brand and competitiveness. Because catering brand is so often an important foundation for the expansion of influence and improvement of popularity and reputation of a restaurant.

Modern catering is a business that integrates technique and art, besides the operation and management. To explain it, catering business includes not only technical service and table service, but also operation techniques and cooking and service art, which all make it more difficult to manage restaurants. Therefore, restaurant owners should scientifically operate and manage restaurants according to local conditions on the one hand and make restaurants look more artistic on the other.

The cultural and artistic cultivation is the core competitiveness of modern catering enterprises and the employed. Yet the overall competence of the employed in modern catering business, whether in terms of their service concept, knowledge level or business skills, still lags behind the development of catering industry. When catering business is becoming more of a knowledge-intensive business than labor-intensive, the service staffs have more responsibilities to spread culture

and knowledge to enhance cultural communication. Moreover, people must be more educated and focus more on knowledge updating in future. Therefore, it is critical for each service staff to be more educated with variety of knowledge and become a specialist in certain field and to improve his or her ability to obtain knowledge and information.

As an old saying goes, "A craftsman who wishes to do his work well must first sharpen his tools." Service staffs with no good grounding in language or first-rate communication skills will never provide quality service nor make smooth cultural exchange. The art of language should be placed in knowledge, just like seeds grown in fertile soil, for good results.

Besides, it is also of importance to master some necessary knowledge of psychology. To understand customers' psychological activities so as to provide more targeted service for customers, who will as a result get their spiritual satisfaction. It turns out that providing psychological service to consumers is far more important than functional service.

Let's put it this way, "marketing is like a romantic relationship between customers and sellers." It is important to first understand what customers need and then use our understanding as guide to make recommendations to customers, who will in turn have warm feelings and get interested in food provided. Eventually it will be a pleasant eating experience, where on the one hand customers are spiritually satisfied for the aesthetic experience and cultural cultivation, and they also participate in catering activities for diverse eating culture on the other hand.

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