

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/B07/14 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL  
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR  
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)**

**Completion Report**  
(for completed projects only)

<p><b><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within <b>six</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> <li>2. Completion report: within <b>12</b> months of the approved project completion date.</li> </ol>
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**Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)**

**1. Project Title**

Deciphering the Myth of Chinese Emotional Display: The Impact of Chinese Cultural Values and Norms on Emotional Labour Strategies and Customer Service Evaluation

**2. Investigator(s) And Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved**

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Woo Ka Shing, Associate Professor	Lee Shau Kee School of Business & Administration, The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Chan Yi Li, Associate Professor	Lee Shau Kee School of Business & Administration, The Open University of Hong Kong
Others		

**3. Project Duration**

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval (must be quoted)
Project Start Date	1 January 2015	-	-
Project Completion Date	31 December 2016	-	-
Duration (in month)	24 months	-	-
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 December 2017	-	-

## **Part B: The Final Report**

### **5. Project Objectives**

#### 5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. delineate two organizational display rules (i.e., positive affect display and negative affect suppression) and examine how they affect service employee acting strategies (i.e., surface acting and deep acting),
2. decompose two specific Chinese cultural values (i.e., collectivism and power distance) into sub-dimensions for examining their relationships with organizational display rules, service employee acting strategies, and customer service evaluation,
3. uncover unique features of Chinese emotional display in relation to the two acting strategies;
4. using individual as the unit of analysis, empirically test these relationships from both employee data (study 1) and customer data (study 2) across different service sectors, and
5. in light of the study findings, provide managerial implications to practitioners on devising display rule requirements and modifying

#### 5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: 19 December 2014

Reasons for the change: Reduced budget

There was no change in research objectives, but the project scope was adjusted.

The project was planned to be implemented through two studies (Study 1: frontline service employees; Study 2: customers). In view of the reduced budget, the project scope in Study 1 was changed as follows:

1. The number of subjects was cut down from 5,000 to 2,500 for the questionnaire survey. The subjects were coming from a wide variety of service industries and the response rates varied. Such diversity of survey responses helps enhance the generalization of the research results. The overall response rate was about 35% with a total of almost 900 valid responses for Study 1. These responses are sufficient for data analysis given the fact that there are 8 constructs (and around 50 measurement items) being studied in the conceptual model.
2. As the subjects came from a wide variety of service industries, it was not possible to obtain the permission of their respective employers for cross-validation of survey responses through observation. Therefore, the cross-validation of survey data using 150 subjects previously planned was not undertaken. This is not an important issue as the 900-responses can be used for split-half cross-validation purpose.

### 5.3 Realisation of the objectives

*(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)*

The objectives of this project were achieved through the following ways:

1. A conceptual model and related hypotheses for employees and customers respectively were developed after a rigorous literature review on (a) organizational display rules, (b) employee's acting strategies and nonverbal behaviour, (c) specific Chinese cultural values, and (d) customer's responses towards employee's nonverbal behaviour.
2. Further works on (a), (b), and (c) mentioned above were undertaken through an employee survey across both commercial service and nursing service sectors. A total of 827 valid responses were collected for data analysis and for testing of hypotheses relating to employees.
3. Further works on (d) mentioned above were undertaken through an experiment for testing customers' responses towards employees' nonverbal behaviour. A total of eight video vignettes were used as stimuli for testing the hypotheses relating to customers.
4. Synthesizing the results of both employee survey (Study 1) and customer experiment (Study 2), theoretical and practical implications as well as directions for future research were then provided.

### 5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

<b>Objectives</b> <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	<b>Addressed</b> <i>(please tick)</i>	<b>Percentage Achieved</b> <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. delineate two organizational display rules (i.e., positive affect display and negative affect suppression) and examine how they affect service employee acting strategies (i.e., surface acting and deep acting),	√	100%
2. decompose two specific Chinese cultural values (i.e., collectivism and power distance) into sub-dimensions for examining their relationships with organizational display rules, service employee acting strategies, and customer service evaluation,	√	100%
3. uncover unique features of Chinese emotional display in relation to the two acting strategies	√	100%
4. using individual as the unit of analysis, empirically test these relationships from both employee data (study 1) and customer data (study 2) across different service sectors	√	100%
5. in light of the study findings, provide managerial implications to practitioners on devising display rule requirements and modifying employee acting strategies through proper training	√	100%

## 6. Research Outcome

### 6.1 Major findings and research outcome

*(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)*

1. The findings from the study highlight that in line with Western culture, positive affect display is associated with deep acting (but not with surface acting), and negative affect suppression is associated with surface acting (but not with deep acting). In examining the relationship between Chinese cultural values and emotional labour, some of our findings correspond to expectations while others are unpredicted. Intriguingly, the unpredicted results of the two studies suggest that idiosyncratic features of Chinese culture do exist and influence emotional labourers.
2. Synthesizing the results of both employee survey (Study 1) and customer responses towards “service with a smile” (Study 2), there is a divergence of employee display behaviour and customer expectations. From the employee’s perspective, the Western mantra of “service with a smile” seems to be much less welcome when compared with other facial markers, most notably with repeated downward nodding. However, the findings based on the customer experiment (Study 2) suggest that both smiling and nodding add value to the perceptions of immediacy and rapport that are associated with positive customer evaluation of service quality. It seems that “service with a smile” is what customers expect, given the widely proclaimed Western idea that “the customer is always right.” Managers, therefore, fall into the dilemma of striking a balance between promoting the “smile” to employees and downplaying the “smile” to customers. To conclude, for customers, the use of other positive emotional display (i.e. nodding) carrying a message of “we care” or “service with a heart” can be equally, if not more, effective than “service with a smile” in an unsmiling Chinese culture.
3. Based on the results, the findings on employees and customers were presented in two conferences respectively for management and marketing. A paper combining both Studies 1 and 2 arising from this research project has been submitted to the *Academy of Management Journal* for publication consideration.

### 6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action

*(Maximum half a page)*

Based on the objectives of this research project, we made several contributions to the emotional labour literature by examining the issue of emotional labour in a hybridized culture from employees’ and customers’ perspectives. At the same time, we spot that there are several potential areas for further development.

1. Longitudinal study. Cross-sectional data used in this research project cannot be used to infer causality of the relationships among the indigenous Chinese cultural values, organizational display rules, employee acting strategies, and the employees’ nonverbal immediacy behaviour. Future studies may use a

longitudinal research design to better understand the cause-and-effect relationship among the constructs.

2. Data source. The use of self-report measures from a single source in this study raises the issue of common method variance. However, the use of self-report measures from a single source is considered necessary to assess the constructs of respective Chinese cultural values and display rule requirements that are underlined in the conceptual model. From the employees' perspective, these constructs matter most as they represent their perceptions, feelings, and experiences. The feasibility of using data from multiple sources should be examined in future studies.
3. Insignificant hypotheses. In this research project, some of the hypotheses were found to be not significant. One possibility is that traditional Chinese cultural values are losing their influence in the present era that is being exposed to a greater globalization and hybridization. Future efforts are required to confirm the importance of these traditional Chinese cultural values in the eyes of the millennial generation.

The above potential areas for further development will be addressed in future FDS application.

## 7. Layman's Summary

*(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)*

Emotional labour is rule-laden and culture-bound. The requirements of display rules developed in the West may not fully capture the intricacies of emotion and emotional display in inter-personal relationships in the East. Globalization gives a fresh impetus to the juxtaposition of indigenous and foreign values in particular regions, which introduces further complexities when researching emotional labour in these hybrid cultures. In this study, we use an emic approach to examine the effect of indigenous Chinese cultural values on emotional labour, re-visit the applicability of the Western-based "Duchenne smile" as a focal physiological marker of authentic emotional display in Chinese culture, and investigate related issues across both the commercial and nursing sectors. Results from two empirical studies show mixed findings for the hybrid Chinese culture. Chinese customers tend to expect service employees to smile, similar to their Western counterparts. However, whereas a grin smile is used by service employees to convey authenticity of positive emotions in the smiling Western cultures, in the less emotionally expressive Chinese hybrid culture, they may smile less often and only display a thin smile when serving their customers. The extent of smile relates more to culture than it does to the authenticity of emotional expression.

**Part C: Research Output****8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

*(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)*

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) <i>(denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)</i>	Title and Journal / Book <i>(with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)</i>	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the institutional repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance <i>(For paper accepted but not yet published)</i>	Under Review	Under Preparation <i>(optional)</i>						
		Yes (Dec 2017)		Ka Shing, Woo & Yi Li Bobbie, Chan	Grin or thin? Emotional labor and customer responses in an unsmiling hybrid culture <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	No	Yes [Attachment 1]	Yes	Yes

**9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered**

*(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)*

<b>Month / Year / Place</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Conference Name</b>	<b>Submitted to RGC</b> <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	<b>Attached to this Report</b> <i>(Yes or No)</i>	<b>Acknowledged the Support of RGC</b> <i>(Yes or No)</i>	<b>Accessible from the institutional repository</b> <i>(Yes or No)</i>
December 2016, Australia	Examining the Moderating Role of Chinese Cultural Values on the Relationship between Emotional Labour Acting Strategies and Related Micro-expressions	Australian New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) Conference	No	Yes [Attachment 2]	Yes	Yes
December 2016, Australia	Examining the Impact of Chinese Cultural Values on Emotional Labour Acting Strategies	Australian New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) Conference	No	Yes [Attachment 3]	Yes	Yes

**10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning**

*(Please elaborate)*

The concept of emotional labour has been developed since the 1980s. Its significance has been well documented in both Western academic literature and textbooks. As this study is germane to the Chinese culture, the findings of this study together with practical implications have been addressed in relevant seminars and teaching materials for discussion and further thought on how to manage emotion and emotional display in a Chinese cultural context.

**11. Student(s) Trained**

*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Degree Registered for</b>	<b>Date of Registration</b>	<b>Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation</b>
NIL			

**12. Other Impact**

*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

NIL

**13. Public Access Of Completion Report**

*(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)*

<b>Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access</b>	<b>Reasons</b>
NIL	