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“To all who come to this happy place, welcome. Shanghai Disneyland is your land. Here you leave today and discover imaginative worlds of fantasy, romance, and adventure that ignite the magical dreams within all of us. Shanghai Disneyland is authentically Disney and distinctly Chinese. It was created for everyone bringing to life timeless characters and stories in a magical place that will be a source of joy, inspiration, and memories for generations to come.” –Bob Iger

(Shanghai Disneyland Resort Dedication taken from DAPS Magic, 2016)

The Walt Disney Company’s newest international theme park venture, Shanghai Disneyland, promises to be different from previous international theme parks. Shanghai Disneyland promises to still be a Disney park but a *Chinese* Disney park. This distinction is important because in the past Disney has just reproduced its American parks within a host country assuming that what works in the United States would work in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. The Walt Disney Company soon realized when their international parks were not doing well that what they originally assumed may not be correct, and they have been trying to correct their mistakes with each new park ever since. Shanghai Disneyland represents the Walt Disney Company’s chance at fixing their mistakes and showing the world that the idea of a theme park, especially a Disney-owned and operated theme park, can work outside of the United States.

The Walt Disney Company owns and operates three international theme parks in Paris, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. While the Disney Company does not own or operate Tokyo Disneyland, it did help design and plan the park as well as receives royalties from the theme park. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of national culture in Disney’s international theme parks in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. This paper will analyze the main cultural missteps of the Walt Disney Company in all three of these theme parks. From there, these missteps will be

analyzed in relationship to the newest Disney international theme park in Shanghai to assess if (1) Disney has learned to balance selling American culture and being culturally sensitive to the host country's culture and (2) forecast if Shanghai Disneyland is likely to succeed or fail in terms of park attendance and park revenues in coming years.

Park attendance and park revenues are principal determinants in determining the success of theme parks so it is important to analyze them when defining the success or failure of a theme park. Park attendance is the number of guests the park attracts each year. The Walt Disney Company relies on their parks attracting guests to visit not only once but returning to the visit the parks again and again. If a park cannot do that, the park’s attendance numbers are affected as well as its revenues. Revenues at the theme parks come not only from admission to the park but also from food and merchandise sales in the park as well. The Walt Disney Company has to be able to sell an experience in order to attract guests to travel to the park, buy park tickets, and buy souvenirs and food while they are at the park.

Literature Review

Multinational companies today face a global-local dilemma where they want to standardize their products when they are abroad, versus adapting their products to the local markets. Rugman and Verbeke (2004, p.4) use “the concept of *global impasse* to describe the problems faced by even the largest companies to repeat their home triad base market share performance in the two other triad markets [Europe and Asia].” Companies focus on providing products and services to their part of the triad but often forget to adapt to the other two areas. This concept is not exclusive to the Walt Disney Company, in fact, “very few MNE’s have the ability to sell standardization products and services around the world” (Rugman & Verbeke,

2004, p. 6). This does not mean that Disney and other multinational companies lack the capacity to learn, they just have a strong desire to maintain the status quo with their products and services abroad. Disney and other multinational companies can maintain their trademarks like Disney’s signature guest service, but at the same time, they need to make these trademarks appealing to the local culture. This is where the universalism versus particularism debate, which is discussed in more detail later in this section, is important.

Managers of multinational companies tend not to consider culture when making decisions for their companies. Mistakes made by managers’ leads to what David Ricks calls “blunders” in his book *Blunders in International Business*. Ricks (1993, p.2) discusses how a lot of companies make mistakes because they forget that consumers differ culturally from country to country; managers who forget this fact often commit “blunders”. In order to be successful, managers of multinational companies need to try to understand foreign cultures when making decisions (Ricks, 1993, p. 7). Ricks (1993, p.7) argues that the most important aspect of culture is communication and the most “blunders” occur because of it. Managers need to pay attention to differing cultures and their different communication styles in order to avoid making “blunders”.

Davis and Schulte (1997), in the early chapters of their book *National Culture and International Management in East Asia*, discuss various different scholars’ definitions and views of the concept of culture. The scholars’ definitions of culture they discuss are Tylor (1877), Linton (1945), Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952), Barnouw (1963), Hofstede (1980), and Kumon (1984). From these definitions, they pulled common themes and created one “overarching” definition of culture. Davis and Schulte (1997, p. 65) define culture as,

*something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group, (b)
something that the older members of the group try to pass on to the younger members,*

and (c) something (as in the case of morals, laws, or customs) that shapes behavior or structures one’s perception of the world

Culture is shared by a society and shapes people’s behaviors and their perspectives of the world.

This can affect how guests act in theme parks as well as perceive them. There are also specific aspects of culture that can affect the behavior and perception of guests in theme parks.

Many different scholars over the years have studied culture and identified different aspects of culture to explain different traits or phenomena of culture. For the purpose of this paper, five aspects of culture will be highlighted: context, uncertainty avoidance, indulgence, neutral versus emotional cultures, and universalistic versus particularistic cultures. The first aspect of culture this paper will discuss is context. The idea of context was highlighted by Edward Hall in 1976 in his book *Understanding Culture*. In his book, Hall discusses that there are two types of culture: high context cultures and low context cultures. According to Hall (1990, p.6, emphasis added), high context “is one in which *most* of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message.” Low context “is just the opposite; i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall & Hall, 1990, p. 6). People from high context cultures do not need a lot of explicit information to interpret messages; whereas, people from low context cultures need the message to be explicit in order for them to interpret it.

The next area of culture discussed is uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance is one of Geert Hofstede’s dimensions of culture that he studied in the 1980’s. Other dimensions of culture he studied were power distance, individualism, masculinity, and indulgence. For the purpose of this paper, the only dimensions of culture discussed are uncertainty avoidance and indulgence. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as “the degree to which members of a society feel

uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Hofstede, 2001). Those cultures that score high in uncertainty avoidance do not like the idea of the unknown; whereas, cultures that score low in uncertainty avoidance do not mind the idea of the unknown.

The next area of culture discussed is the concept of indulgence. Indulgence is another one of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. Indulgence is defined as a “society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede, 2001). The opposite of indulgence is restraint in which a society does not allow free gratification and actually restricts gratification through societal norms and pressures (Hofstede, 2001). For the purpose of this paper, indulgent societies would be more likely to spend a lot of money at theme parks and take their children out of school to have fun at a theme park. This is in contrast with societies that show restraint, who are more likely to spend less at theme parks and not take their children out of school to visit theme parks.

The last area of culture this paper will focus on is neutral versus emotional cultures. This dimension of culture was researched by Fons Trompenaars in the 1990’s who expanded on the research of Hofstede. According to Trompenaars (2003, p.31), the difference between neutral and emotional cultures is explained in the question of “are emotions controlled or do people display emotions overtly?” Neutral cultures tend not to show their emotions; whereas, emotional cultures are more open to showing their emotions. Analyzing neutral and emotional cultures is important within service industries as they rely on positive interactions for their businesses to thrive.

One area of culture that pertains specifically to the Walt Disney Company is the idea of universalism, which was also studied by Fons Trompenaars. Universalism versus particularism is

best described by the question “do people in the organization tend to follow standardized rules or do they prefer a flexible approach to unique situations?”(Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2003, p. 31). People who are American and companies that are largely American in values (like Disney) believe in this idea. Universalism helps to explain the mentality behind Disney’s copy and paste method with their international theme parks since universalism equates to standardization in business. The Walt Disney Company wants to standardize their product (theme parks) and their policies in every country they conduct business in. This standardization helps increase the efficiency of the company. The Walt Disney Company’s use of a universalistic mindset assumes that what works in the US with their theme parks will work anywhere with little to no modification. As seen throughout this paper, this is far from true.

General Definitions

Before going into the background of the Walt Disney Company and its theme parks, it is necessary to define some terms that are used throughout the paper. These terms are defined as the researcher understands them as a former cast member of the Walt Disney Company. The first term that needs to be defined is “guest”. Instead of calling people who visit their theme parks customers, the Walt Disney Company refers to visitors of their theme parks as guests. This is to keep up with the show and the storytelling of the company since Disney is inviting visitors into their home as their guests. The second term is “cast member”. Instead of calling their employees, employees, Disney refers to their employees as cast members. Since the Walt Disney Company is an entertainment company, they put on a show for each guest that visits their parks. The employees at Disney theme parks are a part of the show and therefore members of the cast. This is where the term cast member derives from. The last term to define is an “attraction”. An

attraction is similar to what one would equate to as a ride. But an attraction is what the Walt Disney Company uses to describe all rides and shows in its theme parks.

This paper will start with a background of Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris, and Hong Kong Disneyland before discussing how each cultural misstep applies in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. After discussing the cultural missteps, a brief background of Shanghai Disneyland will be given. Then, the cultural missteps will be applied to Shanghai Disneyland. This paper will end with a prediction of whether or not Shanghai Disneyland will succeed or fail in the coming years.

Background Information

The Walt Disney Company and its American Theme Parks

Before discussing the cultural missteps taken by the Walt Disney Company (TWDC) at their international theme parks, a quick overview of the company and its international theme parks will be given. The Walt Disney Company is an entertainment conglomerate with business divisions in movies, television, radio, theater, publishing, and theme parks. Since the focus of this paper is international theme parks, only a brief history of the American theme parks will be discussed. Walt Disney thought of the idea of the theme park one day when he took his daughters to a local park and watched them as they rode the merry-go-round (Disney, 2009). Disney wanted a place where children and their parents could have fun and enjoy the rides together (Disney, 2009). Disneyland was, thus,

Conceived as a celebration of America’s past and as a paeon to its progress, or as Walt Disney put it: ‘the older generation can recapture the nostalgia of the days gone by, and the younger generation can savor the challenge of the future (Bryman, 1999, p.31).

As Bryman argues, Disneyland was designed to make the older generation feel nostalgic. This feeling of nostalgia is created on Main Street, USA and Frontierland which represent America’s past. Disneyland was also created to capture the imagination of children as seen in Fantasyland and Tomorrowland.

Disneyland opened in Anaheim, California on July 17th, 1955. Walt Disney’s theme park idea soon expanded past what he had space to build in Anaheim which encouraged the construction of the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. The Magic Kingdom, the first theme park built at the Walt Disney World Resort, opened after Disney’s death in October of 1971 (Disney, 2009). The feeling of nostalgia is recreated and expanded at the Magic Kingdom with a larger Adventureland, Frontierland, and Main Street, USA, and the addition of a land named “Liberty Square”. This land is themed around the American colonies at the time of the American Revolution. Just like in Disneyland, children’s imagination roams free in Fantasyland and Tomorrowland. From the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Disney theme parks have expanded across the world to Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, and the newly opened park in Shanghai.

Tokyo Disneyland

Tokyo Disneyland (TDL) was the Walt Disney Company’s first attempt at planning and developing an international theme park. In the 1970’s after Walt Disney’s death, the Walt Disney Company was not doing well financially when the Oriental Land Company (OLC) approached the company about opening a theme park in Tokyo. The Oriental Land Company, according to Raz (1999, p.4), author of *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, is a partnership between two large firms in Japan, the Mitsui Real Estate Development and Keisei Electric Railway. The Walt Disney Company was hesitant to open a new theme park in its current

financial state, but the OLC offered them a deal that was hard to resist. The Oriental Land Company would own and operate Tokyo Disneyland while the Walt Disney Company would receive “10 percent of admissions fees and 5 percent of the revenues from food and souvenir sales” (Raz, 1999, p. 27). The Walt Disney Company also received licensing fees up to 20 million dollars for their characters, attractions, and more, as well as control over the design of the park and control of park operations (Raz, 1999, p. 27; Eisner & Schwartz, 1998, p.263). Although the deal seemed alluring at the time, the Walt Disney Company would soon come to regret the deal they made with the Oriental Land Company.

Tokyo Disneyland opened on April 15th, 1983 and is described as “a carbon copy of its American counterparts” (Dawson, 1999, p.52). Tokyo Disneyland features seven themed lands, World Bazar, Adventureland, Westernland, Critter Country, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland and Toon Town (Raz, 1999, p.32) and features many of the same attractions found at the Disneyland Resort in California and the Magic Kingdom at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. In addition to the Tokyo Disneyland Park, the Tokyo Disneyland Resort has one more theme park, Tokyo Disney Sea. Tokyo Disney Sea will not be discussed in much detail in this paper as the park and its attractions are unique to the Tokyo Disneyland Resort and the cultural missteps that apply to other parks do not apply to Tokyo Disney Sea.

During the first five years of operations, Tokyo Disneyland was able to attract more than 9 million guests each year (Tokyo Disney Resort guest statistics, n.d.). In more recent years, the Tokyo Disneyland Resort (Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo Disney Sea) attracts more than 25 million guests a year (Toyoda, 2014, p. 3). In 2012, approximately 15 million guests walked through the gates of Tokyo Disneyland making it the third most visited theme park in the world after the Magic Kingdom in Florida, welcoming approximately 17.5 million guests in 2012, and

Disneyland in California, welcoming approximately 16 million guests in 2012 (Toyoda, 2014, p.3). In 2015, Tokyo Disneyland welcomed 16.6 million visitors into the park (Linder, 2017). As seen by its high attendance figures, Tokyo Disneyland is the only Disney theme park that is able to continuously attract guests year after year, therefore, meeting its attendance quotas or goals. For more detailed information about Tokyo Disneyland’s park attendance numbers, see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix.

The record-breaking attendance at the Tokyo Disneyland Resort is matched by its revenues. In 1992, the resort “earned more than \$200 million during the worst recession in modern Japanese history” (Spencer, 1995, p.105). This revenue went to the Oriental Land Company and the Walt Disney Company was only able to receive a small percentage of these revenues. Other than this figure, it is difficult to find other data on the revenues of the Tokyo Disneyland Resort. The Oriental Land Company owns other resorts throughout Japan, and their financial data does not break revenues by operational segments. The Walt Disney Company in their financial statements lists the revenues made from Tokyo Disneyland as “royalties” (The Walt Disney Company, 2016, p. 68). In addition, to their comments on the royalties of Tokyo Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company has also stated that the merchandise sales (which TWDC makes 5% from) in TDL have been stable (Xu, 2012, p.18). The great success of this theme park is why the Walt Disney Company regrets not owning any part of the park. The royalties help the company’s bottom line but owning even a small stake in Tokyo Disneyland could help bolster the company’s international theme park revenues.

The Walt Disney Company regrets not having control of the Tokyo Disneyland Resort since it has been consistently successful over the past four decades. At the time with its financial state, the Disney Company thought having a park built for them would be great. But now that

Tokyo Disneyland is the only truly successful Disney international park, they may have some regrets. The great success of the Tokyo theme park led Disney executives to make different decisions in regards to future international parks. Executives decided they would have full control over future theme parks so they could reap the benefits of international theme parks. But having full control also means dealing with the failure of parks and the consequences of failure which the Walt Disney Company would soon learn with their next park, Disneyland Paris.

Disneyland Paris (formerly Euro Disneyland)

While Tokyo Disneyland is considered a great success, the Walt Disney Company’s next international theme park venture, Euro Disneyland, is quite the opposite. In the 1980’s with the great success of Tokyo Disneyland, TWDC entertained the idea of building another international theme park. The Walt Disney Company knew they wanted to build a park in Europe but needed to find a place where they could build their own reality free from the sights and sounds of the real world. The Walt Disney Company chose Marne-la-Vallee in France over 200 other sites in Europe (Fawcett, 1992, p. 13) because of the “willingness of the French government to offer cheap and plentiful land, cheap loans, road and rail links to the park, tax breaks, and other modest financial inducements” (Curwen, 1995, p.15). This plot of land, just under a half an hour away from Paris, is where the Walt Disney Company would build its first Disney owned and operated international theme park.

When the Euro Disney Resort opened, the Walt Disney Company had a 49% stake in the resort with the French government owning the other 51% (Luthans & Doh, 2015, p. 255). In order to help manage and operate the Paris resort, the Walt Disney Company created Euro Disney S.C.A (Euro Disney S.C.A, 1995). As of 2016, the Walt Disney Company currently owns

81% of the Paris venture and is looking to increase its ownership of the resort (The Walt Disney Company, 2016). When the resort opened, it included one theme park, Euro Disneyland, which had five themed lands, Main Street, USA, Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Discoveryland (Disneyland® Park, n.d). The resort also included an entertainment complex, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show”, six hotels, and a campground (Fawcett, 1992, p.13). A second theme park, Walt Disney Studios Park, opened at the resort in 2002. One would imagine that all of these things would attract guests from all over Europe to come and visit, but that is not the case.

Since Euro Disneyland was the Walt Disney Company’s first international theme park venture on their own, the start of the theme park was a bit rocky. On opening day, April 12th, 1992, only 50,000 guests visited the park, a tenth of the crowd they expected (Disneyland Paris Brief History, n.d.). Four years later, the theme park finally saw a record-breaking year where 11.7 million guests visited the park (Guyot, 2001). In more recent years, the number of guests visiting the theme park seems to be declining. In 2015, park attendance at the theme park dropped 4.5% according to a Global Attractions Attendance report (Lockett, 2015). In its 2016 annual report, the Walt Disney Company stated that Disneyland Paris saw park attendance decrease in 2016 (p.26). Low attendances numbers for the theme park has led to a lot of financial issues over the years for the theme park in Paris. For more detailed information about Euro Disneyland’s park attendance numbers, see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix.

By deciding to build the entire resort at once, the Walt Disney Company assumed a lot of debt. During the first two years of operation, Euro Disneyland’s park attendance and hotel occupation were below what the Disney Company had estimated. According to Gumbel and Turner (1994, p.A1) in a *Wall Street Journal* article, “as of Dec. 31, Euro Disney, which opened

in April of 1992, had a cumulative loss of 6.04 billion francs or \$1.03 billion”. Euro Disneyland was struggling financially and something had to be done to save the park. The Walt Disney Company CEO at the time, Michael Eisner, negotiated a deal with the banks helping to finance the project in France and in the US to restructure the debt of the park in order to save it from closing down. This deal included the Walt Disney Company agreeing to have a billion francs on standby credit for ten years and “waiving royalties and suspending management fees for five years” and the banks agreeing to “defer payments of outstanding capital for three years” and accepting “an 18 month moratorium on interest payments”(Curwen, 1995, p. 18). These debt restructuring terms helped to save the Euro Disneyland theme park from being shut down after only two years of operation.

After the near miss of having to close down Euro Disneyland, executives at the Walt Disney Company discussed what could be done to help save the theme park. One of the biggest alterations was changing the name from Euro Disneyland to Disneyland Paris. Eisner and Schwartz (1998, p. 292) comment on the name change,

As Americans, we had believed that the word “Euro” in front of Disney was glamorous and exciting. For Europeans, it turned out to be a term they associated with business, currency, and commerce. Renaming the park “Disneyland Paris” was a way of identifying it not just with Walt’s original creation but with one of the most romantic and exciting cities in the world

This name change and other changes across the park helped increase attendance and revenues for a few years but not enough for the park to be profitable year after year. Euro S.C.A has not reported a profit for the Disneyland Paris resort since the 2008 fiscal year (Fritz, 2016, p. B.1). According to the Walt Disney Company’s 2016 annual report, Disneyland Paris had lower guest attendance which would lead to lower profits for the theme park (p.26). Between debt restructuring, name changes, and the addition of a second theme park, nothing seems to be

drawing enough guests to Disneyland Paris to maintain high park attendance numbers and high revenues. For more detailed information about Euro Disneyland’s revenues, see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix.

The Walt Disney Company does not view the issues with the Disneyland Paris as cultural issues rather they view the issues as a string of bad business decisions. Walt Disney Company executives saw the opening of Disneyland Paris as “a chance both to correct shortcomings in our previous parks and to bring theme parks to a whole new level” (Eisner & Schwartz, 1998, p.270). Those executives still made decisions that led to shortcomings in regards to cultural insensitivity to the host country’s culture. If they had realized their mistakes, the mistakes they made would have been fixed when they built Hong Kong Disneyland thirteen years later or when they built Shanghai Disneyland twenty-four years later.

The Walt Disney Company executives view the “failure” of Disneyland Paris as a debt issue. TWDC built Hong Kong Disneyland in sections in order to not accumulate as much debt as they did with Disneyland Paris. For this reason, when Hong Kong Disneyland opened, it was the smallest Disney theme park and resort. The Walt Disney Company is still paying for its debt mistake which is why Disney views it as a debt problem. In the near future, Disney plans on investing another approximately \$1.6 billion dollars into the Disneyland Paris resort to help boost its financial position (Pelts, 2017). The Walt Disney Company needs to realize that it is not only a debt issue, there are other underlying issues as well.

After interviewing three Disneyland Paris cast members, the researcher believes the Paris theme park may be failing because of cultural problems. The researcher’s view is that maybe the French were not ready for Disney when the park opened. Current Disneyland Paris cast members

attribute the rocky start of the park to the fact that the French were not ready for such an American product. A Disneyland Paris attractions cast member comments that “French and European demand wasn’t ready for a product so ‘Americanized’” (2017). This is the reason that the park accumulated so much debt and did not have strong attendance numbers in its early years. The Walt Disney Company has been trying to overcome this problem since the park opened. Even though Disney slightly acknowledges that it could be a culture problem, they have not indicated that they have fully acknowledged the problem or plan to address it anytime soon.

Hong Kong Disneyland

After the less than favorable start in Europe with Disneyland Paris, the Walt Disney Company turned to China to try to get a foothold in a country opening up to the west with a growing population of consumers. In a partnership between the government of Hong Kong and the Walt Disney Company, TWDC would own 47% of Hong Kong Disneyland (HKDL) and the government of Hong Kong would own the remaining 53% (Gale Group, 2016). Also as a part of the deal, the Walt Disney Company would receive “10% admissions, 10% participant, 5% merchandise, 5% food and beverage sales, 5% hotel revenue. The base management fee was 2% and the variable management fee ranged from 2% to 8%” (Choi, 2010, p.578). The theme park was built thirty minutes outside of Hong Kong on the underdeveloped Lantau Island where Disney could ensure that it could create its own reality (Holson, 2005, p. C.1). Similar to what happened in Paris, the Walt Disney Company was able to negotiate good terms for building the park on this land.

To ensure that the Walt Disney Company did not make the same mistakes in Hong Kong as they did in Paris, TWDC decided to build this park gradually over time to assume less debt

rather than building it all at once (Higgins & Hugue, 2014, p.13). Hong Kong Disneyland opened on September 12th, 2005 with four themed lands, Main Street, USA, Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland, housing just sixteen attractions (Miller, 2007, p. 31; Matusitz, 2011, p.671). The number of lands and attractions on opening day made Hong Kong Disneyland the smallest Disney theme park which may help to explain its low attendance numbers throughout the past decade.

Park attendance at Hong Kong Disneyland has never been record-breaking like in Tokyo Disneyland or Disney’s US theme parks. In 2005, the opening year of the park, attendance for Hong Kong Disneyland was 5.6 million guests which is below the number of guests Disney had forecasted for the year (Fowler & Marr, 2006, p. B.1). Lower attendance in 2005 may have been caused by Hong Kong Disneyland being “so small that visitors had to wait in lines for hours before enjoying the park rides and other attractions” (Matusitz, 2011, p.677). The following years saw an increase in attendance at Hong Kong Disneyland as the park expanded offering more attractions for its guests. But in 2015 with the anticipation opening of Shanghai Disneyland in mainland China, attendance decreased at Hong Kong Disneyland by 9% to 6.8 million guests (Fritz, 2016, p. B.1). Now that the Shanghai theme park is open, park attendance for Hong Kong is likely to stay the same or decrease significantly. For more detailed information about Hong Kong Disneyland’s park attendance numbers, see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix.

The revenue of Hong Kong Disneyland follows the same pattern as its park attendance. Since fewer people are visiting the park, the park is making less money from tickets, merchandise, and food. Fritz in a 2016 *Wall Street Journal* article, “Disney Looks to Bolster Overseas Theme Parks”, reports that Hong Kong Disneyland made its first net profit in 2012 (p. B.1). It took seven years for Hong Kong Disneyland to begin to turn a profit compared to the

four years it took Disneyland Paris to turn a profit. Therefore, the Disney Company’s idea of building the park in phases did not help the revenues of the park since Hong Kong took more time to turn a profit than Paris.

The profit making abilities of the Hong Kong theme park only lasted a few years. According to the Annual Business Review for Hong Kong Disneyland, revenues decreased by 6% in 2015 which resulted in a net loss for the fiscal year for the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort (Hong Kong Disneyland, 2015). Similar to the situation in Disneyland Paris, the spending habits of the Chinese guests are lower than those of the consumerist guests visiting parks in the US (Fritz, 2016, p. B.1). These lower spending habits help to explain the lower revenues for Hong Kong Disneyland over the course of its operation. Equivalent to the situation with park attendance, it is hard to predict how the Hong Kong theme park will do in regards to revenues now that Shanghai Disneyland is open. For more detailed information about Hong Kong Disneyland’s revenues, see Exhibit 1 in the Appendix.

Similar to the situation with Disneyland Paris, the Walt Disney Company does not view their mistakes as cultural mistakes; they view them as bad business decisions. The mistakes corrected with the Hong Kong Disneyland theme park were “outside of Disney’s eagerness to learn from its lack of ‘skin in the game’ in Tokyo Disneyland and its over-exposure to risk in the case of Disneyland Paris” (Higgins & Huque, 2014, p.17). The Walt Disney Company wanted ownership to fix the mistakes from Tokyo, and they wanted to build the park in sections to fix the mistakes from Paris. But there were still mistakes to be fixed when the Shanghai theme park opened up. Shanghai Disneyland’s opening date was pushed back so the park would be complete on opening day. This decision was made to correct a mistake from Hong Kong Disneyland where guests felt that the park was half-finished when it opened (Lockett, 2015). The Walt Disney

Company does not see the problems with their parks as cultural problems; they view them as bad business choices.

Methods

Qualitative methods were used for this project given the broad nature of this study. The researcher used both primary sources through interviews with cast members who have worked or visited international theme parks and secondary sources (case studies, scholarly research, magazine and newspaper articles) about Disney’s international theme parks. The participants were purposefully selected by the researcher based on the researcher’s connections as a former cast member. The participants are themselves current or former cast members and have worked at or visited Disney’s international theme parks. In total, five people agreed to be interviewed for this project. This number is small due to the researcher’s limited connections and the company’s stringent press policies. Three participants worked at the Disneyland Paris Resort and two participants worked at the Walt Disney World Resort. Four of the participants discussed the Disneyland Paris Resort and one discussed the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions asked can be seen in Exhibit 2 in the Appendix.

Criteria

The criteria used to analyze the data from the cast member interviews was a broad cultural lens. This lens includes analyzing the data using the different areas of culture discussed in the literature review: context, uncertainty avoidance, indulgence, neutral versus emotional cultures, and universalistic versus particularistic cultures. Context is how much extra information is needed to understand communications within a particular culture. In regards to context, Japanese and Chinese are high context cultures, American culture is a low context culture, and

French culture is a moderate culture on the context spectrum but is higher than the US on the context culture spectrum. Uncertainty avoidance is how much or how little a culture avoids what they do not know. French and Japanese are high uncertainty avoidance cultures meaning they do not like the unknown and they try to avoid it. Chinese culture and the culture of Hong Kong are low uncertainty avoidance cultures meaning they are okay with the unknown and do not go out of their way to avoid it. American culture scores in the middle of the uncertainty avoidance spectrum.

An indulgent culture is one where a culture allows gratification and a culture that is more restraint does not allow gratification as much. Chinese culture, Japanese culture, and the culture of Hong Kong are restrained cultures. French culture is in the middle of the indulgence and restraint spectrum. American culture is high in indulgence. A neutral culture is one where people do not show a lot of emotion and the opposite is an emotional culture where people show a lot of emotion. In regards to neutral and emotional cultures, Japanese culture and the culture of Hong Kong are neutral cultures; whereas, American, Chinese, and French culture are emotional cultures. The cultural lens also includes analyzing the data using different cultural norms that the interviewees mentioned when discussing their interview theme park. This was the broad objective criteria the researcher used to determine significant statements. From those meanings and statements, the researcher discovered the findings below.

Findings

This section first reports on the general view of Disney’s international theme parks within the host country as seen by the cast members interviewed. This is followed by the perceptions of the cast members of each cultural misstep as it applies to the park they were interviewed on.

Lastly, this section closes with the cast member’s perspectives of culture in the theme park they were interviewed on. The researcher interviewed five current and former cast members about the general use of culture throughout the park as well as the culture used in the themed lands, the service with a smile customer service expectations, and family values and consumer values in the host country’s culture. There are mixed findings of how the cast members view guest’s opinions of Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland. One Disneyland Paris cast member views guests as loving the park and embracing Disney. Another cast member views the park as continuing to struggle especially with the renovations occurring in the park for the past two years in preparation for the parks 25th anniversary in 2017. Another cast member thinks the park is not able to keep up with the current times because Disneyland Paris only gets small renovations here and there because of its debt problems. In Hong Kong Disneyland, the cast member notes that the park is not considered a “destination park” like the ones in the US which may lead to lower guest opinions of the theme park. Overall, the opinions of the cast members are mixed of how guests view Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland.

The cast members interviewed on Disneyland Paris have mixed opinions about the themed lands within the park. They all agree that the lands have been changed and adapted for Disneyland Paris. For example, Main Street, USA is more American and modern in Disneyland Paris than in Disney’s US theme parks. One cast member mentions that Disney’s storytelling abilities pull together the themed land concept for those who do not know or understand the ideas behind Main Street, USA, Frontierland, or Adventureland. Another cast member believes that the themed lands do not fit into the tourist experiences of the French, but they work well for those guests seeking a world of fantasy. Another cast member describes that Discoveryland, Disneyland Paris’ version of Tomorrowland, was uniquely French in its theme of celebrating

French explorers of the past, but recently the land has lost that theme with the addition of Star Wars and Toy Story (Buzz Lightyear) attractions. Each cast member views the lands differently depending on their experience with the lands and where they have worked as a cast member. In Hong Kong, the themed lands looked the same in Hong Kong Disneyland as they did at the Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida to the former cast member who visited the park. But Adventureland seemed more rugged and more adventurous than the ones in the US.

The cast members who work in Disneyland Paris generally agree that the service with a smile expectations does not work too well in France. The French are considered by most to be “cold” people, so the service with a smile expectation tends to clash with the French culture for both cast members working at the park and French guests visiting the park. But this expectation depends on the guest and the cast member. American cast members and guests are used to smiling and being smiled at, whereas, guests and cast members from France and Europe are not. This was one of the only areas of agreement between the cast members who were interviewed on Disneyland Paris. In contrast to Disneyland Paris, the former cast member who visited Hong Kong Disneyland thinks that service with a smile does translate well into the culture of Hong Kong but as a Chinese-American who grew up in the United States, their observations may be biased.

Family values are another area of disagreement between the cast members interviewed on Disneyland Paris. The American cast member believes French and American family values are similar, and children can be seen in the park on school days. The French cast members contradict this, they believe that the education is important to the French and it is rare to see children in the park on school days which is why attendance is so low during the months of the French school year. The cast member interviewed on Hong Kong Disneyland shares the same view about

Chinese culture as the French cast members do about French culture. The Chinese are less likely to take their children out of school to visit a theme park because education is important in the Chinese culture.

The cast members interviewed on Disneyland Paris agree that in French culture guests are more likely to bring their own food into the park and picnic than spend a lot of money on food and drinks in the park. The topic of souvenirs is where they disagree. The American cast member working in Paris believe the consumer culture is the same between parks. The French cast members (one of which has worked in Disney’s US parks) think the consumer culture is different. In the US, guests are more likely to buy a lot of souvenirs; whereas, in France, guests are more likely to buy only one souvenir to remember their trip by. There are similar findings in Hong Kong Disneyland. Guests are more likely to bring food into the park to eat than buy it. The consumer culture is also different in Hong Kong. Chinese guests can get cheaper items closer to home than they can in the theme park. The Chinese guests are more likely to buy the counterfeit merchandise since it is cheaper than the official merchandise in the theme park.

Lastly, all the interviewees were in consensus about the overall feel of the culture of the theme park they were interviewed on. All the cast members describing Disneyland Paris agree that it is a mixture of American and French culture and in some cases even European culture as well. One cast member did say that they felt like Disneyland Paris was more American than French, but they still described the park as an overall mixture of cultures. The cast member who visited Hong Kong Disneyland also felt that the park was a mixture of Chinese and American culture. Most of the findings from the interviews resulted in mixed results in the areas interviewed but the interviews gave important insight to the researcher about the cultures surrounding Disney’s international theme parks.

Cultural Missteps in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong

Now, where did the Walt Disney Company go wrong? The low theme park attendance and revenues in Paris and Hong Kong are caused by something; Disney believes they were due to poor business decisions. However, there have been a few cultural missteps taken by the Walt Disney Company when they planned and designed each theme park. These missteps are interpreted, even if it is subconscious, by the guests of the host country when they visit the park, which explains the low attendance numbers and park revenues at each park each year. According to Altman (1995, p.14) in “A theme park in a cultural straitjacket: The case of Disneyland Paris, France”, “the underlying assumptions behind the Disney theme parks (as all its other products) is that they are *culture free*.” After guests visit the international theme parks, that culture free assumption is proven wrong. Even if it is not blatantly evident to the guest, the theme parks are inherently American in design and operation.

This paper discusses four cultural missteps made by the Walt Disney Company in their international theme parks. The first misstep is the design of the theme park itself with its “themed lands”. Lands such as Tomorrowland and Fantasyland can transcend cultures, whereas, lands such as Main Street, USA, Frontierland, and even Adventureland do not. The second misstep lies with the attractions themselves. Some classic attractions that are popular and guest favorites in Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom do not translate well or make sense in other cultures. The third misstep is Disney’s signature excellent guest service. While Disney’s service with a smile is expected and the norm in the United States, it can be repellent in other cultures. The last misstep is the difference in family values and consumer culture between the United States and the host country.

Before going into a deeper discussion of the cultural missteps by the Walt Disney Company in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong, it is important to note a small caveat about Japanese culture and Tokyo Disneyland. Tokyo Disneyland is very successful because of the Japanese obsession with American culture. When building and designing Tokyo Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company wanted to make alterations to make the park more “Japanese”. However, when the Oriental Land Company built Tokyo Disneyland, they “did not try to adapt to the culture in which it was built. It worked because of the Japanese attachment to Disney characters and the ultimate US entertainment experience.” (Tai and Lau, 2009, p. 1). The Oriental Land Company knew that the Japanese loved American culture, and the park would do well designed and built just like the ones in the United States.

Another important caveat to note is that Disneyland Paris “is much closer to the original Anaheim model [Disneyland] than Tokyo Disneyland ever was” (Altman, 1995, p. 55). So even though the Japanese wanted and still claim that they have an exact copy, the park in France more closely resembles Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom than the park in Tokyo and in Hong Kong. These facts are important to keep in mind. While the researcher tried to find and generalize missteps that would fit across all of Disney’s international theme parks, it was difficult to find four perfect fits because of the unique situation of Tokyo Disneyland.

The Themed Lands Concept

All Disney theme parks are designed based on themed lands. In each land, the theme is reflected “in the surrounding infrastructure, the appearance of employees, the character of food and other franchises, and the entertainment” (Curwen, 1995, p.15). The original Disneyland in California was designed with a land that acts as a throughway to guide guests to the castle, Main

Street, USA. From the castle, the other themed lands jut out like spokes of a wheel with the castle being the main focal point of the theme park. The Magic Kingdom in Orlando, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris, and Hong Kong Disneyland all follow the same original layout of the park in California. Most of the theme parks across the world include the same original themed lands as Disneyland as well, but there are a few exceptions in each park. The two themed lands that will be discussed in great detail in this section are Main Street, USA and Frontierland since they do not translate well into other cultures like Fantasyland or Tomorrowland do. Adventureland will be discussed as well due to the cultural implications surrounding the theming of the land.

Main Street, USA. Although it is not obvious to the guest when they walk into the park, American history and culture are deeply rooted in the park from the moment the guest steps through the gates. Before walking through a world of fantasy, which starts at each infamous Disney castle, guests must first walk through Main Street, USA (this is true in all Disney theme parks except Tokyo and Shanghai which will be discussed in further detail later). In “Consuming the West: Main Street, USA”, Philips (2002, p.32) describes the Disney main street as

Not the continuation of any recognizable geography or history but rather an idealized construction of small-town America that never was. It has no roots in any particular locality, nor any relation to the geography outside the gates of the park

Main Street, USA is loosely based on Walt Disney’s childhood hometown in Marceline, Missouri and represents the main street of any American town at the turn of the 20th century. Main Street, USA represents a time of a wholesome America to many guests and while walking down Main Street, USA, they feel a sense nostalgia. For this reason, the moment guests step into a Disney theme park, “America thus becomes the dominant narrative of the park, with the majority of its lands devoted to telling the stories of American history” (Philips, 2002, p.34).

Although this land does not host any attractions, it does have shops and eateries for guests to stop by on their way to and from the castle and the rest of the theme park.

Although Tokyo Disneyland claims to be a replica of Disneyland in California, there are a lot of differences between the two theme parks. When building the theme park, the Oriental Land Company modified a few themed lands and attractions so that “themes nostalgic for Americans but meaningless for the Japanese have been renamed and recontextualized to capture the attention of the new clientele” (Brannen, 1992, p. 221). Main Street, USA is renamed to the World Bazaar at Tokyo Disneyland and keeps “the quasi-Victorian architecture of the buildings”, but hints of Art Deco façade are added to the buildings in Tokyo (Brannen, 1992, p.222; Marling, 1997). The renaming of the land does not change the theming of the land being inherently American. The idea of “Main Street” is a concept used by American towns to describe their main thoroughfare. There are no main streets in Japan so the theming of the land is lost to the Japanese as they walk through the shops in this land before reaching the infamous Disney castle.

As stated previously, Walt Disney imagined lands such as Main Street, USA so older American guests could feel a sense of nostalgia while walking through the park. Toyoda (2014, p.15) comments on how Japanese guests view the American –based themed lands of the park,

Typical frequent visitors, who are younger and more familiar with American culture than the middle-aged and elderly visitors, may be more aware of certain American cultural elements, but it is still not likely that they, and probably most Japanese, experience a sense of ‘good old America’ or ‘ideal America’ when they visit TDR

Japanese guests do not feel this same sense of nostalgia as American guests do and just equate lands like Main Street, USA as something stereotypically American. Lands like Main Street,

USA create cognitive dissonance within Japanese guests because the theme is lost to the guests, but the land also appeals to the guests since they like all things American.

Similar to Tokyo Disneyland, Main Street, USA in Disneyland Paris is altered from the original Disneyland model to fit the French perspective. Main Street, USA still has its Victorian façade like in Disneyland, but it is updated with “contemporary dimensions of America, mostly through graphics, billboards, and signs displayed along the street” (Eisner & Schwartz, 1998, p. 271). The “modern” updates were added to Paris’ Main Street, USA because of European’s love 1920’s America (Luthans & Doh, 2015, p.256). The updates to the land again do not change the overall theme of the land, which is nostalgia. This creates a problem since there are no main streets in France, therefore, French and European guests do not feel that same sense of nostalgia as American guests do while walking down Main Street, USA. This land does not deter guests as much since it does not have any attractions. This land just has shops and is used a thoroughfare to get to the infamous castle. If it had attractions and more of a presence to guests in the park, it would detract guests from France and Europe since that sense of nostalgia is lost on them.

Main Street, USA is also the first land guests experience when they first enter Hong Kong Disneyland. According to a former cast member interviewed, Main Street, USA in Hong Kong looked and felt the same as Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom (WDW Cast Member 2, 2017). Similar to Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland Paris’ Main Street, USA’s, Main Street, USA in Hong Kong Disneyland is lost to guests from Hong Kong and China. They do not feel the sense of nostalgia that American guests feel when walking down Main Street, USA. This land again is used as a thoroughfare to the castle, so it does not have as much of an impact as other lands do on the experience of guests while in the park. This is why it does not detract

guests too much from the park and negatively affect park revenues and attendance like other American-themed lands do in the theme park.

Frontierland. The underlying hints of American culture and history do not stop with Main Street, USA, these hints can be seen in Frontierland as well. According to *Designing Disney’s Theme Parks*, Frontierland represents the American west around the 1840’s with small towns equipped with everything from a saloon to a general store (Marling, 1997, p.96). This land presents the American dream of the time period, braving the “rough terrain” of the unknown frontier in the hopes of finding gold and becoming rich (Brannen, 1992, p. 219). The theme of this land becomes a problem when Frontierland is copied in the parks in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong because the Walt Disney Company is standardizing their theme parks using a universalistic mindset. There is no frontier in Japan, France, or China. People from those countries never had the dream to move west, explore the great unknown, and maybe if one is lucky strike big and become rich. The whole theme of this land gets lost in translation in Disney parks outside of the United States.

The problem with the themed land of Frontierland in Tokyo Disneyland is that there was not a frontier conquered on the island of Japan. In the United States, the frontier was the west as Americans moved into the unknown following the idea of Manifest Destiny. Similar to Main Street, USA, this land had to be renamed in order for Japanese guests to understand the theme of the land. Frontierland at Tokyo Disneyland becomes Westernland. Brannen (1992, p. 225) in the article “‘Bwana Mickey’: Constructing Cultural Consumption at Tokyo Disneyland”, quotes a spokesperson for Tokyo Disneyland, “we could identify with the Old West, but not with the idea of the frontier.” Some of the Japanese understand the idea of the American West from watching cowboy shows such as “Rawhide” and “Bonanza” on television (Brannen, 2004, p. 608). To

these guests, the premise of “Westernland” makes sense. But for a majority of guests who do not watch cowboy television shows, they “did not really understand” Westernland (Luthans & Doh, 2015, p.253). The name change does not change the theme of the land. Westernland is still themed after the American west with saloons, general stores, and runaway mine trains. Since the American west is an inherent part of American history and culture, it does not make sense to the Japanese guests who visit Tokyo Disneyland.

In addition to the idea of the American west and the frontier being out of place in Japan, Japanese culture is a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which means they like to avoid the unknown. This should mean that an entire land dedicated and themed around the idea of the unknown and uncertainty should not do well. Tokyo Disneyland is the abnormality of Disney international theme parks, so even though Frontierland is all about the unknown and the Japanese do not like the unknown, Tokyo Disneyland still does well (in terms of park attendance and park revenues). Frontierland does not deter guests because the Japanese equate it with cowboys and Indians which is something seen as inherently “American”. Since the Japanese are obsessed with all things American, they are okay with the idea of Frontierland and just accept it as a part of American culture, instead of being deterred by land because of its underlying themes of conquering the unknown.

Similar to Japan, France never had a “frontier” to conquer. There was no west to move to with the hope of starting a new life. Frontierland in Disneyland Paris is similar to Tokyo Disneyland in that Frontierland was updated based on what Europeans think the American west and the frontier is (Luthans & Doh, 2015, p.256). This update did not include a name change like in Tokyo but did include some reimagining so the land fits the European idea of the American west. French culture is also a high uncertainty avoidance culture, so the French tend to avoid the

unknown as they do not like it. The high uncertainty avoidance helps to explain the change in the theming of this land from US parks to Paris. If the French do not like the unknown, it makes sense to theme the land around the idea of the stereotypical American west and cowboys and Indians rather than conquering the great unknown of the American frontier. The French enjoy the stereotypical American west so much that the Haunted Mansion, a classic attraction that takes place in the French culture infused New Orleans in the US theme parks, was adapted and modified to take place in an American west mining town in Disneyland Paris. This shows the extent that the French like the idea of the American west and cowboys and Indians.

Even though, the French really enjoy the idea of the American west, and cowboys and Indians; Frontierland and Disneyland Paris still are not doing well. This is because of two reasons. The first relates back to the idea of uncertainty avoidance. The whole theme of Frontierland is conquering the frontier of the American west (the unknown) even though the land has been modified to represent the European view of the American west, the underlying theme of the unknown still exists within the land. This creates a cultural tension for the French since they do not like the idea of the unknown. The second reason this land does not do well is the whole theme of the land. There was no west or frontier in France for the French or Europeans to conquer. So while the French and Europeans relate to the stereotypical American west, which this land represents, they do not relate and feel that sense of nostalgia that guests from the United States feel when they visit this land. The whole idea of this land underneath the façade of entertainment is lost to guests from France and Europe.

Frontierland in Hong Kong Disneyland is one of the few small hints that the Walt Disney Company may be learning from its mistakes when it comes to cultural sensitivity in international theme parks. The reason the Walt Disney Company may be learning is that Frontierland does not

exist at all in Hong Kong Disneyland. It is not renamed to fit into the Chinese culture and none of the attractions, like Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, that are usually featured in Frontierland are anywhere else in the park. The Chinese are different than the French and the Japanese in that they do not really identify with or enjoy the idea of the American west. This may be because they are low in uncertainty avoidance which means they are okay with the unknown and do not avoid it. Since the idea of the American west is all about conquering a new frontier and the unknown this may be why the Chinese do not identify with it. Not having a Frontierland in Hong Kong Disneyland shows that the Walt Disney Company is learning to adapt to cultures because even though Frontierland is iconic in the US theme parks, they did not include it in Hong Kong. This shows that the Disney Company may be learning to research and understand cultures before they build and design their theme parks.

Adventureland. Adventureland does not hint at American history as much as Main Street, USA and Frontierland do. But it does hint at a part of Western history that many people want to forget, colonialism or imperialism (Raz, 1999, pg. 9). Rather than rooted in American history, Adventureland is rooted in Western history, one where people are exploring jungles and looking for treasure. In this land, guests must “fight their way through the turbulent waters... encountering savages and beasts along the way” (Brannen, 1992, p. 219). The land relies heavily on the theming of exploring foreign and exotic lands. Fung and Lee (2009, p.203) discuss Adventureland saying that the “concept relies heavily on the First World fascination with the other. Despite decolonization and a heightened awareness of racism, Disney refuses to change the outdated view of Adventureland; instead, it extends its worldview to the other.” American culture is in the middle of the uncertainty avoidance spectrum so in some ways Americans are okay with the unknown and in others they are not. When it comes to exploring and conquering

the unknown, most Americans are okay with the unknown which is why this land works well in US theme parks. This is not the case in Disney’s international theme parks, though.

Although Japan had an empire and participated in colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries, their view of colonialism and empires differs from those in Western countries. They did not participate in 19th and 20th-century imperialism or colonialism, so the underlying themes of this land are lost to the Japanese just like the themes of Main Street, USA and Frontierland are lost to the Japanese. In addition to the theme of this land being misplaced, the idea of adventure and the whole idea of the land should not work well in Japan because the Japanese are a high uncertainty avoidance culture. This means that they do not like the unknown and therefore would not like the idea of adventure or the idea of this land. This land within Tokyo Disneyland works because just like the entire theme park, the Japanese equate it with American culture. Since the Japanese love American culture and all that comes with it, they are okay with this land within Tokyo Disneyland. This land does not deter guests from a lack of understanding so Japanese guests keep on returning making Tokyo Disneyland have high guest attendance and high revenues.

Adventureland is a bit of a sensitive subject at Disneyland Paris. Disneyland Paris does have an Adventureland but it is not home to a staple and “classic” attraction of this land. In the US, the land is home to the classic attraction, the Jungle Cruise, where guests travel down rivers like the Nile and the Amazon exploring what those jungles have to offer. Even though the attraction is considered a classic in the US, there is no Jungle Cruise attraction at Disneyland Paris. This is because the attraction reminds the French of colonialism and imperialism (Van Maanen, 1992, p.27). On that front, the Walt Disney Company is culturally sensitive, but in regards to uncertainty avoidance, Disney is not. French culture is a high uncertainty avoidance

culture which means they avoid the unknown. Since this land is all about the unknown, the French do not like it, since they do not like the unknown. They are not like Americans who have a fascination with the unknown. Also, the French try to avoid references to colonialism to try to forget about their imperialistic past. For these two reasons, this land and its theming do not work well in Disneyland Paris.

Similar to Japan, China did have colonies but their view of colonialism and imperialism differs from those from Western countries. Since they did not participate in Western imperialism or colonialism, the underlying theme of Adventureland is lost to Chinese guests. The culture of Hong Kong is a low uncertainty avoidance culture which means they are okay with the unknown. The undertone of the theme of the land is conquering and exploring the unknown in areas where colonialism and imperialism occurred, mainly Africa. If the people of Hong Kong are okay with the idea of the unknown then the theme of the land is lost to them and does not provide that same value it does to a guest from the US. For this reason, this land does not work well in Hong Kong Disneyland.

The Walt Disney Company did not consider areas of host country’s culture in regards to the stories and themes of their lands. If they did, they would have realized that Main Street, USA, Frontierland, and Adventureland are misplaced and do not translate well in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong. Just because they are a part of Disney’s theme park package in the Walt Disney Company’s universalistic mindset does not mean they will work well outside of the United States. These lands are not Fantasyland or Tomorrowland. They do not have broad theming and stories that can transcend culture. Main Street, USA, Frontierland, and Adventureland as themed lands are rooted in American culture with underlying aspects of American values, beliefs, and views, which do not make sense to guests from other countries. Not understanding the theming

and story of these lands creates confusion and cultural tension in guests leading them to not return to the theme park, which lowers park attendance and park revenues. For a summary of the themed lands section, see Exhibit 3 in the Appendix.

“Classic” Attractions Do Not Translate Into Other Cultures

Just as some themed lands do not translate well into other cultures, there are some attractions which are considered classics that do not translate well into other cultures. These attractions include Pirates of the Caribbean, Haunted Mansion, the Enchanted Tiki Room, the Jungle Cruise, Country Bear Jamboree, and it’s a Small World. These attractions are considered classics because they were opening day attractions at either Disneyland or the Magic Kingdom or they were created and designed by Walt Disney before he passed away. Though they are considered classics to fans of Disney’s American parks and to Disney executives, the attractions do not translate well into other cultures. The theming, soundtracks and even jokes of the attractions do not make sense outside of the United States or outside the context of American culture.

A caveat should be made here as well. For younger guests who visit the theme parks, attractions like Pirates of the Caribbean will make sense because of the film franchise. After the popularity of the Pirates of the Caribbean films, the Walt Disney Company updated the Pirates of the Caribbean attractions across the world to include elements from the movies. For this reason, the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction makes sense to guests outside of the US because they know and can identify elements of the movie in the attraction. Though Haunted Mansion and Country Bear Jamboree were also movies, they were not successful films so their attractions were not updated to reflect the movies.

Another important area to note for this section is that in Hong Kong Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company made no effort to give guests the backstory of the attractions they are experiencing if the attraction is based on a Disney film. Many of these guests do not know Disney characters and films like their counterparts around the world. A lot of scholars criticize the Disney Company for not giving guests the background of the characters in attractions before they experience the attraction. Fung and Lee (2009, p. 204) comment on this saying “Disney makes no attempt to explain the plot and the characters to the diverse audience [referring to the Festival of the Lion King attraction].” Attractions are not appealing to guests who do not know or understand the characters of the attraction and their story. This misunderstanding can deter guests from wanting to return to the theme parks

The two attractions that will be discussed in-depth in this section are Pirates of the Caribbean and the Haunted Mansion. Other classic attractions that are listed at the beginning of this section are discussed in Exhibit 4 of the Appendix. The original storyline for the Pirates of the Caribbean attraction followed pirates as they pillaged and plundered an island in the Caribbean. This storyline has since been updated to include recognizable characters from the film franchise of the same name like Captain Jack Sparrow, Captain Barbosa, and Davy Jones. This attraction exists in one form or another in Disneyland, the Magic Kingdom, Tokyo Disneyland, and Disneyland Paris. Before the film franchise, this misstep was very relevant in Tokyo Disneyland as the Japanese could not relate to the idea of western pirates. Now that the film franchise exists, the attraction has been updated to include characters that people know and love from the movie. Guests focus more on the characters that they know versus the original story of the attraction. The update makes the attraction more appealing to younger guests who

have seen the films but still creates a cultural tension in older guests in Japan who have not seen the films and cannot identify with the idea of western pirates.

The Haunted Mansion is a “classic” attraction that follows ghosts throughout the house they live in. This attraction exists in one form or another in Disneyland, the Magic Kingdom, Tokyo Disneyland, Disneyland Paris, and Hong Kong Disneyland. In Tokyo, “the ghosts in the Haunted Mansion are distinctly foreign to the Japanese. They sing in English and dance to unfamiliar music (the original Disneyland lyrics are hardly comprehensible)” (Raz, 1999, p.47). For this reason, the attraction does not make sense in Tokyo Disneyland (Van Maanen, 1992, p.21). The idea of death and the belief in ghosts differs in each culture, so the ghosts in the Haunted Mansion in Tokyo do not make sense. In Disneyland Paris, the Haunted Mansion is modified to reflect the fact that the French like the American west. So guests in France pay less attention to the view of death and focus on the story theme of the American west. In Hong Kong, the attraction is modified again to include fewer ghosts and more “haunts” in a museum. The Walt Disney Company modified this attraction to be respectful to the Chinese view of ghosts and death. This attraction (except in Tokyo, but that quote is slightly dated) shows that Disney is learning to adapt to the host country’s culture.

These attractions are all popular attractions in the United States but outside of the US, they can lose their meaning and value. When bringing “classic” attractions from the US to international theme parks, the Walt Disney Company needs to align these attractions with the cultural values of the host country. In the US, Americans love pirates and they have an odd fascination with ghosts; this is not the case in other countries. This is why these “classic” attractions do not translate well into other cultures. The mistranslation and communication can

deter guests from returning to visit Disney’s international theme park which affects each parks attendance and revenues.

Disney’s Signature Service with a Smile

While Disney’s signature service with a smile is expected and is now considered a cultural norm for guest service in the United States, in other cultures, the overly happy and smiling Disney cast member can be seen as repulsive, since people in other cultures are not used to be smiled at by strangers. When the Walt Disney Company copied and pasted their theme parks outside of the United States, they expected the parks to operate and have the same guest service as the parks in the United States. In some cultures, service with a smile is hard for the cast members working in the park. These cultures are usually high context and neutral cultures. It is also odd to the guests in the park who are being smiled at constantly by cast members all around them. In Paris and Hong Kong, the service with a smile attitude may help to contribute to the low attendances figures of the theme parks.

Tokyo. Similar to the previous missteps, service style in Tokyo is the outlier of the theme parks. The Japanese cast members and Japanese guests have no problem with Disney’s signature service with a smile. Brannen (2004, p. 609) comments on this phenomenon, “Disney had no trouble reproducing its core competence in providing friendly service and a clean, safe, and orderly environment. Such a service orientation fits smoothly into the Japanese cultural norms of harmony, cleanliness, and order.” When the Walt Disney Company copied and pasted their theme park and their service mentality into Japan, the Japanese had no problem adapting to the Disney service model. Guests who visit the park are not deterred by overly friendly or happy cast members, as it fits in well with the Japanese culture.

Japanese culture is a high context and neutral culture, so why does Disney’s service with a smile expectations not deter Japanese guests visiting Tokyo Disneyland? The Japanese as a neutral culture do not like showing emotions and as a high context culture, they are not very explicit with the context of communications. This pairing should mean that the Japanese cast members would dislike smiling all the time and would dislike being smiled at by strangers. There is an aspect of universalism that was not discussed in the literature review that is important to discuss; universalistic cultures also strictly follow rules and procedures (Luthans & Doh, 2014, p. 129). This paired with Japanese being a collectivist culture leading to the desire to save face may explain why service with a smile works in Japan, which may overshadow the idea of a neutral culture when it comes to cast members in the theme park. Since the guests equate the Disney theme park with American culture, and they are obsessed with American culture, they just go along with that the smiling cast members are part of the American culture they are so obsessed with. The Tokyo Disneyland theme park is the outlier out of the Disney theme parks which is why the service with a smile expectation for cast members has worked well for the park.

Paris. The French were very resistant towards Disney’s strict guest service policy both as cast members and as guests. First, as cast members, the organizational culture of the Walt Disney Company and the French culture did not mix well together. An American cast member working at Disneyland Paris commented on the French reception of Disney service, “France is certainly not known for their customer service with a smile and that idea of customer service, or lack thereof, definitely clashes with Disney’s idea of customer service” (DLP Cast Member 2, 2017). The organizational culture of Disney and the French culture clash a lot when it comes to service with a smile. When the park first opened, the French young adults disliked having to be the happy Disney cast member. The young adults coming to work for Disneyland Paris “did not like

to smile incessantly” (Curwen, 1995, p. 16). But twenty-five years later, it still seems that the cast members do not want to follow Disney’s strict service culture as seen in the former cast member’s comments. Cast members forcing themselves to be happy can be perceived as fake by guests and discourage guests from all cultures from coming back. This can hurt attendance numbers and revenues since Disney relies on guests coming back and visiting the park again.

Guests visiting from outside of France would be deterred by the forced smiling cast members but guests from France are just deterred from cast members smiling at them in general. As guests to the theme park, the French do not really like Disney’s service with a smile policy; they feel that “the foreigners are used to being smiled at, but the French don’t understand it. They think they are being taken for idiots” (Forman, 1998, p.252). The American cast member interviewed who works in Disneyland Paris shares similar experiences to what Forman describes above. The cast member (DLP Cast Member 2, 2017) describes their experiences with French guests commenting,

Sometimes when I greet guests in my American excitement and smile they are a bit taken aback as if all that positivity is too much for them but I think it’s just jarring when most of our Cast Members do the bare minimum in regards to customer service

As an American, a cast member is used to smiling and being positive as that is what Americans equate with good customer service. The French guests the American cast member interacts with are taken back by their upbeat and happy demeanor. But some French cast members do not follow the service with a smile mentality, which French guests prefer compared to the happy and upbeat cast member. The Disneyland Paris cast member notes that maybe the differences between cast members and their service mentality may be off-putting to guests who visit the park (DLP Cast Member 2, 2017). Between the stark differences in service mentality and the overly

happy cast members, French guests can be put off by any cast member they see while at the park. This could affect whether or not they decide to come back and visit.

French culture is an emotional culture which means compared to others they show emotions more. This does not mean that they are okay with smiling and being overly happy. Just because a culture shows more emotion does not mean that they will be okay with strict work policies dictating emotional management. The French, like most cultures outside of the U.S., find people outside of their family smiling at them strange. They also feel like the cast members think they are idiots. The French are moderate on the context spectrum which means some things need to be explicit to them, which is why people smiling at them for no reason all the time is off-putting. Just because two cultures are the same when it comes to certain cultural dimensions does not mean that what works in one country will work in another. Both the US and French culture are emotional and vary on context but they receive Disney’s service expectations differently. The Walt Disney Company needs to factor this as a reason why Disneyland Paris may not be doing too well.

Hong Kong. The Chinese are more like the French than the Japanese when it comes to Disney’s guest service expectations. Like the French, the Disney service expectation can be viewed both from a cast member perspective and a guest perspective. From a cast member perspective, the Chinese do not like the expectation the Walt Disney Company has placed on them to provide service with a smile. The Chinese culture is a neutral culture, so they like to keep their emotions and reactions reserved. Matusitz (2011, p.676) explains what happened in Hong Kong as “this Disneyfication, this attempt to turn Chinese crew members into smiling robots, did not work.” The Chinese who visit as guests also do not like the smiling and friendly cast members, but for slightly different reasons. The Chinese who live in Hong Kong perceive

people who are overly friendly like cast members at Disney with suspicion (Matusitz, 2011, p.675). Both of these deter Chinese people from working in the park as cast members and Chinese people from visiting the park as guests. This helps to explain the attendance and revenue problems at Hong Kong Disneyland.

The culture of Hong Kong is a neutral culture which means they do not like showing emotions to anyone that is not close family or friends. This causes a problem for people from Hong Kong working at the park who are expected to smile at guests because to Disney that is good customer service. This is why training people from Hong Kong in Disney guest service did not work well. The culture of Hong Kong is neutral, which also explains why guests from Hong Kong are suspicious of the cast members who are smiling at them. Smiles are reserved for friends and family so seeing every cast member smile at them can be off-putting to guests from Hong Kong. Similar to the situation in Disneyland Paris, the Walt Disney Company needs to consider the dimensions of culture when exporting their organizational culture and company policies to a new country. If not the tension created by differing cultural views may result in lower park attendance as seen with the Hong Kong Disneyland theme park.

When the Walt Disney Company copied and pasted their theme parks into other countries, they copied and pasted their policies and procedures as well. This is how most US businesses operate; they want standardization within their organization which follows a universalistic mindset. But the service with a smile concept, which is expected in the United States does not work well in France and in Hong Kong. The guests visiting these Disney theme parks are deterred by the overly happy and smiling cast members and at the same time, the cast members working at these parks do not like smiling at strangers. The tension this service with a smile expectation creates leads to lower park attendance and, therefore, lower revenues at

Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland. For a summary of the service with a smile section, see Exhibit 5 in the Appendix.

Family Values and Consumer Culture

The last misstep that the Walt Disney Company did not account for when they were building international theme parks is the differences in family values and consumer values across cultures. Family values are different in the United States than they are in Japan, France, and China. In the US, it is not uncommon for parents to take their children out of school to go on vacation to Disneyland or Disney World. Also, family vacations and family trips are important as American values. These values do not hold the same regard in other cultures as they do in American culture. Another aspect that may not translate well is the consumerism aspect of American culture. Americans are more likely to purchase souvenirs and a lot of them while visiting Disney theme parks than guests from other cultures.

Tokyo. When the Walt Disney Company opened parks in Tokyo and Paris, they assumed “that family values are relevant to any part of the world” (Tai and Lau, 2009, p.1). Unlike parents in the US, Japanese parents are less likely to take their children out of school to visit a theme park. Japanese parents value education too much to take their children out of school. The Japanese culture is low in indulgence, which means that parents are less likely to take their children out of school to visit a theme park because this can be seen as indulging themselves. If this is the case, then why does Tokyo Disneyland still have such high attendance figures? Tokyo Disneyland attracts more young adult visitors than Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland, which increase TDL’s attendance numbers (Toyoda, 2014). So while children are in school, young adults might visit the park on their day off or after work. A lot of people in Tokyo have

annual passes to the park and the average annual pass-holder visits the park 76 times a year which helps boost the attendance of the park (Toyoda, 2014, p.7). Even though the Japanese value education, the young adults who visit the park frequently help boost the park’s attendance.

Japanese culture is low on the indulgence spectrum, but that does not explain why the park has high revenues each year. The Japanese, since they really like American culture, justify their purchases of souvenirs in the park because of their love of American culture. According to Toyoda (2014, p.16), Tokyo Disneyland was built as a “mass consumption space” for the Japanese, not to reflect “good old America” and American values. Tokyo Disneyland was built to encourage consumerism in the Japanese who like American culture. Low indulgence when combined with the Japanese love of all things American works to Disney’s advantage since the Walt Disney Company relies on not only revenues from theme park tickets but food and merchandise for their park revenues. This helps to explain why the revenues for the theme park have been so high year after year.

Paris. The Walt Disney Company’s assumptions about French family values turned out to be wrong. The French do not share the same idea of family values as Americans at least when it comes to taking their children out of school. Spencer (1995, p.104) comments on European family values, “unlike Americans, Europeans will not take their kids out of school to visit Euro Disney.” Whereas, in the United States, parents are more willing to take their children out of school for a vacation to Disneyland or Disney World. The attendance numbers at Disneyland Paris are affected by these family values. A current cast member at Disneyland Paris (DLP Cast Member 3, 2017) comments that when it is “official French vacation for schools Disneyland Paris is crowded, but when it’s on a regular day the park is empty, in September we have sometimes less than 10,000 guests.” Since French parents are less likely to pull their children out

of school because they value education, Disneyland Paris has lower park attendance numbers. French parents are also less likely to pull their children out of school to visit a theme park because this is considered indulgent behavior which goes against their views of indulgence. But what about during the peak season? That should make up for the off-season low attendance like it does in the US parks. The French and Europeans in general also have a different mindset when it comes to vacationing habits.

As an aside, vacation habits are different for Europeans as well. Americans will go to Disney World or Disneyland and spend a week during different points in the year. Whereas, the French take their vacations all at once, and Disneyland Paris is viewed as a destination worth visiting only for a few days so the park does not seem worth it to Europeans to visit during their longer vacations. Spencer (1995, p.104) comments on this phenomenon, “unlike Americans, European vacation habits run counter to short, expensive visits to Euro Disney.” Europeans do not see Disneyland Paris as a destination park like Americans do with Disneyland and Disney World. They do not think there is enough to do in the park to stay for more than a day or two. Since the Walt Disney Company relies on guests staying for multiple days and guests continually visiting the park; park attendance and revenues for Disneyland Paris are impacted. The vacation habits are different in Europe, which the Walt Disney Company did not account for, they just assumed locals would come to the parks on weekends or people would come visit for quick weekend trips like they do in the US. The difference in vacation mindset and the difference in family values helps to explain why the yearly park attendance numbers are lower than expected at Disneyland Paris.

Consumerism is different in French and European culture as well. Disneyland Paris “has the lowest sales of souvenirs of all Disney’s theme parks” (Brannan, 2004, p. 609). This is

because when Europeans visit the park, “they are less inclined to spend significant amounts on meals, souvenirs, and hotels than their American counterparts” (Bohas, 2014, p.35). In the United States, Americans are more likely to spend a lot of money on food and merchandise in the theme parks. Whereas, in France, Europeans bring food into the park to picnic, and they only purchase one or two souvenirs to remember their vacation by (DLP Cast Member 3, 2017). French culture falls in the middle of the indulgence spectrum, but when paired with high uncertainty avoidance, the French do not spend a lot of money to “spoil” themselves. This explains why they do not buy souvenirs or food in the park. Since the French and Europeans do not spend as much as their American counterparts, the revenues of the Disneyland Paris resort are lower, which does not help with what the Walt Disney Company see as the main problem of the park, the “debt issue”.

Hong Kong. Family values differ in the Chinese culture as well. A Chinese American cast member commented on the difference saying, “that family values like taking trips with your family or going to an amusement park with your family, I feel like that isn’t like a big culture thing there” (WDW Cast Member 2, 2017). The Chinese like the French value education as well. According to the former cast member (WDW Cast Member 2, 2017) who visited Hong Kong Disneyland, Chinese parents are less “willing to take their children out of school. Education is extremely important in Chinese culture and parents are definitely not willing to risk their children's education to pull them out especially not for a trip to a theme park.” Similar to the situation at Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland has lower attendance when school is in session in Hong Kong and in China than when school is not in session. The culture of Hong Kong is also one of restraint, which means they will not take their children out of school for something that is considered an indulgence like visiting Hong Kong Disneyland. The strong

value of education of the Chinese and the culture of restraint helps to explain the low park attendance year after year. As seen in Disneyland Paris, high attendance during peak season does not completely offset lower park attendance during the rest of the year.

Similar to the situation in Disneyland Paris, the spending habits of the Chinese guests are lower than those of the consumerist guests visiting parks in the United States (Fritz, 2016, p. B.1). The guests spend less money in the parks because they can get counterfeit Disney merchandise cheaper and closer to home (WDW Cast Member 2, 2017). These lower spending habits help to explain the lower revenues for Hong Kong Disneyland over the course of its operation. Similar to the French, the Chinese also bring food into the park to eat instead of buying food inside of the park. Since the culture of Hong Kong is also one of restraint, they are less likely to indulge themselves and spend money in the parks on souvenirs and food when they know they can find the souvenirs cheaper elsewhere and can bring food into the park. These reasons explain the lower park revenues for Hong Kong Disneyland.

When the Walt Disney Company built its international theme parks, it assumed that family values and consumer culture would be the same in the host country as it is in the United States. This assumption was wrong. American parents are okay with taking their children out of school to visit a theme park; other cultures value education too much to do this. This difference in family values affects the attendance figures of the parks. Japanese guests and American guests are more likely to buy a lot of their souvenirs while visiting the theme park; whereas, French and Chinese guests will only buy a souvenir or two to remember their trip by. The difference in consumer culture affects the revenues of each theme park. The Walt Disney Company’s incorrect assumptions of host country family values and consumer culture has affected the success of each

of their international theme parks. For a summary of the family values and consumer culture section, see Exhibit 6 in the Appendix.

Shanghai Disneyland

This paper is now going to shift its focus to the Walt Disney Company’s newest international theme park, Shanghai Disneyland. First, some background of the Shanghai park will be given before (1) analyzing how each cultural misstep applies to the Shanghai park, (2) discovering if the Walt Disney Company has learned from past international park mistakes, and (3) predicting how Shanghai will do based on its cultural sensitivity to host country culture and current attendance and revenue figures.

The Walt Disney Company’s newest international theme park is the Shanghai Disneyland Resort in Pudong, Shanghai, China. Plans for the park, a joint-venture which is 43% owned by TWDC and 57% owned by the Chinese government, were announced in 2009, three days after Hong Kong Disneyland opened (The Walt Disney Company, 2016; Tai & Lau, 2009, p.3). Many critics did not understand why the Walt Disney Company would put two theme parks so close to each other claiming that the smaller Hong Kong Disneyland Resort would not be able to compete with the larger Shanghai Disneyland Resort. Higgins and Hugue (2014, p.18) give a possible explanation of the Walt Disney Company’s reasoning behind two theme parks, “but perhaps the most valuable knowledge Disney has gained from HKDL will be applied outside of the joint venture as its works to ensure Shanghai Disneyland Resort becomes a success in the Mainland market.” Since it is difficult for international companies to enter the Chinese market with strict regulations and a consumer population that is unfamiliar with aspects of Western culture, Hong

Kong Disneyland was Disney’s way of giving its bigger park in Shanghai its best chance of survival.

Another way to increase the chance of survival of Shanghai Disneyland was delaying its opening date. The Walt Disney Company wanted to ensure the park was completed before opening the theme park; they did not want to repeat what happened in Hong Kong where many guests felt the park was “half-finished” when it opened in 2005 (Lockett, 2015). When it finally opened up on June 16th, 2016, “the \$5.5-billion Shanghai Disneyland is a colossal 963-acre park three times larger than Hong Kong Disneyland and anchored by the tallest castle in any Disney theme park” (Gaudiosi, 2016, p. 1). Along with the Shanghai Disneyland theme park, “the resort boasts Disneytown and two imaginatively designed hotels- the elegant Art Nouveau- influenced Shanghai Disneyland Hotel and the colorful Toy Story Hotel” (Walt Disney Company, 2016). The Shanghai Resort follows the design of previous Disney resorts including Disney hotels and a Disney-theme shopping district as a part of the resort.

With each park the Walt Disney Company builds, there are groups of guests the parks are intended to attract. Usually, the parks are meant to attract local guests from the region where the park is located. But with the Hong Kong and the Shanghai parks being close to each other, who are the intended audiences for both parks? The Walt Disney Company hopes that the Hong Kong theme park will attract guests from Southern China now that Shanghai Disneyland is open. But the opening of Shanghai Disneyland is predicted to drop park attendance in Hong Kong by 60% (Tai & Lau, 2009, p.11). The Walt Disney Company hopes that Shanghai Disneyland will attract the 330 million “income-qualified” people (people who can afford to visit the theme park) who live within a three-hour drive of the theme park as well as Chinese people who could not previously receive a visa to visit the park in Hong Kong (Wei, 2017; Bland et al., 2016, 15).

The Gale Group in their SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the Walt Disney Company in 2016 lists the Shanghai Disney Resort as an opportunity under new launches for the company (Gale Group, 2016). The resort in Shanghai promises a “‘authentically Disney, distinctly Chinese’ world attraction” (Wall, 2016). But in order to see if Shanghai will really be an opportunity for the company, one needs to see if the park is truly a balance between selling Disney culture to guests and respecting the culture of China as the park’s host country. This next section of the paper will analyze the themed lands, attractions, and guest service, and family values and consumer culture at Shanghai Disneyland to see if the park is truly an “authentically Disney, distinctly Chinese” park.

Cultural Missteps Applied to Shanghai Disneyland

The Theme Land Concept

One important thing to note before discussing the themed land concept is how the layout of Shanghai Disneyland has been changed from the traditional layout described previously (Shanghai Disneyland, n.d.). The layout of Shanghai Disneyland is not similar to Disneyland in California with the long Main Street, USA leading to the castle and all the other lands branching off from the central point of the castle. Shanghai’s version of Main Street, USA described below is much shorter than in previous parks and leads guests to what is colloquially known as the “hub”. The focal point of the hub is no longer the infamous Disney castle. In Shanghai, the focal point of the hub is the “Garden of Twelve Friends” as well as a carousel attraction and the Dumbo the Flying Elephant attraction (Shanghai Disneyland, n.d.). The castle in Shanghai is still the entrance to Fantasyland but it is not the focal point in which all other lands branch out. This

shows the Walt Disney Company may be focusing on culture when designing theme parks since gardens are a large portion of feng shui, an important aspect of Chinese culture.

Main Street, USA. The first cultural misstep of themed lands hints that the Walt Disney Company may have started to learn their lesson. Shanghai Disneyland looks less like Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom and more like a unique Disney theme park. The first alteration in the themed land concept is the change of Main Street, USA to Mickey Avenue. Mickey Avenue is supposed to promote shopping in the new Shanghai theme park (Bland et al, 2016, p. 15). The name change also comes with some changes to the façade of the land. Mickey Avenue retains the feel of Main Street, USA, but Mickey Avenue is more modern than its counterparts in Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom. This updated and modern feel to the new Mickey Avenue will not create the same confusion in Shanghai that was caused in Paris and Hong Kong by the theming of Main Street, USA. Guests from outside the United States will not feel out of place in this land since it more unique than Main Street, USA and is not tied to a historical time and place. This change in name and theming of the land will help Shanghai Disneyland by not discouraging guests who do not know the history of the land. The lack of discouraged guests will have a positive impact on guest attendance and revenues for the Shanghai theme park.

Frontierland. Similar to Hong Kong Disneyland, Shanghai Disneyland does not have a Frontierland. This hints again that maybe the Walt Disney Company is learning its lesson and not just copying and pasting its American parks into the host country. The culture of mainland China is the same as the culture of Hong Kong in regards to uncertainty avoidance. They are both low uncertainty avoidance cultures meaning that the unknown does not frighten them. Matching the decision made in Hong Kong Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company decided not to include a Frontierland in Shanghai since the Chinese do not identify with the idea of the American west

and conquering the unknown. Also similar to Hong Kong Disneyland, this change shows the progress made by the Walt Disney Company and they are researching and trying to understand the culture of the home country before designing and building their international theme parks.

Adventureland. Adventureland is modified and updated in Shanghai Disneyland to Adventure Isle. This new land again hints that the Walt Disney Company may be learning to adapt to the host country’s culture before building their theme parks. The Chinese culture, similar to the culture of Hong Kong, is a low uncertainty avoidance culture so Chinese people are okay with the idea of the unknown. As mentioned above, Chinese guests being okay with the idea of the unknown means that the underlying theme of the land is lost to Chinese guests. Chinese guests do not get the same thrill and experience in Adventureland as guests from the United States do. In Shanghai Disneyland, the undertones of imperialism and colonialism are erased from the land. Instead, the land focuses more on the broad idea of “adventure” with attractions like “Soarin’ Over the World” and “Roaring Rapids” (Shanghai Disneyland, 2017). This removes the confusion and misunderstanding about the underlying theme of the land being imperialism and colonialism, while also appealing to the Chinese view of the unknown. The change in the theming of this land in Shanghai shows that the Walt Disney Company is learning to adapt to the host country’s culture and shows the company is taking a step in the right direction with the themed lands concept.

Classic Attractions. In regards to classic attractions, Shanghai Disneyland only has two “classic” attractions, only one of which is relevant to this paper, Pirates of the Caribbean (Shanghai Disneyland, 2017). Dumbo the Flying Elephant is not important because there is no story being told throughout the attraction like in Pirates of the Caribbean. Shanghai Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean is different than its counterparts in other parks. There is more

technology infused into the ride and more references to the film franchise. The attraction includes less audio animatronics and less of the original storyline of the “classic” attraction. Since the Chinese cannot identify with western pirates and conquering the Caribbean but can identify with characters like Captain Jack Sparrow and Captain Barbosa, this change is good. This change in the theming and story of the “classic” attraction shows that the Walt Disney Company is learning to adapt to the host country’s culture by theming rides based on a story the host country guests can identify with and not a story that is foreign and unknown to them.

The other attractions like the Jungle Cruise, the Haunted Mansion, the Enchanted Tiki Room, etc. do not exist in any form at Shanghai Disneyland. This could be for two reasons, the first is that they are not really technologically advanced attractions, so they may seem out of place in a very tech savvy and technologically advanced park like Shanghai Disneyland. Or the second reason where the Walt Disney Company has been slowly testing these attractions outside of the US with each new park and realized that they do not work or make sense outside of the United States and they finally decided to not include them in Shanghai Disneyland. If that is the case, then it shows that the Walt Disney Company is learning to adapt to the host country’s culture.

Disney’s Signature Service with a Smile

Disney’s service with a smile expectation is an area where the culture of mainland China and Hong Kong differ. Mainland China is an emotional culture, so they like to express their emotions; whereas, the culture of Hong Kong is a neutral culture so they do not like showing emotions. Disney’s service expectations do not work well in Hong Kong with a neutral culture, but it may work well in the emotional context of mainland China in Shanghai. Or it could follow

what happened in Disneyland Paris and create cultural tension for guests visiting the park. There has not been any research on the cast members or guest service at the Shanghai Disneyland theme park nor has the Walt Disney Company released any information about it. But the researcher predicts that Disney’s service with a smile expectations exists in this park, which will create cultural tensions like in Disney’s previous theme parks.

Based on the analysis of other Disney parks, it looks like Shanghai Disneyland will follow the example set by Paris and Hong Kong in that service with a smile will not be received well by guests in mainland China. A lot of guests from mainland China have visited Hong Kong Disneyland and even though they were from an emotional culture they were unsettled by the smiling cast members. Even though Americans expect smiling and friendly people in guest services roles and Americans equate it to good customer service, that expectation has not been adapted all over the world. People from mainland China similar to people from Hong Kong or Paris reserve smiling for close friends or family, which may lead to cultural tensions between smiling cast members and guests from China. Guests from China may perceive the cast members with suspicion like the guests who visit Hong Kong Disneyland. This cultural tension will affect park attendance if it deters guests from coming back like in previous Disney theme parks.

Family Values and Consumer Culture

Similar to Hong Kong Disneyland, the Chinese guests who visit Shanghai Disneyland value education more than their American counterparts. For this reason, Chinese parents will be less likely to pull their children out of school to visit a theme park during the school year. So comparable to the situation at Hong Kong Disneyland, Shanghai Disneyland will have high attendance during the summer and when school is not in session and will have lower attendance

when school is in session. Also similar to Hong Kong Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company still is not sure about the spending habits of the Chinese since they have been closed off to Western culture and ideas. The spending habits will most likely be similar to those in Hong Kong. Guests will not buy as many souvenirs as their American counterparts due to different levels of indulgence and counterfeit products sold outside of Shanghai Disneyland. The guests will also bring in food to eat instead of purchasing it at the park. These will all affect the revenues of Shanghai Disneyland just like it affects the revenues of the park in Hong Kong.

The culture of China is similar to the culture of Hong Kong in that they are both restrained cultures. This helps to explain why they spend less money in the theme parks since they do not like to treat themselves like guests in the US theme parks would. Since the Chinese are less likely to indulge, they are also less likely to take their children out of school for a vacation. The restraint shown by the Chinese may help to explain the lower park attendance and park revenues of Shanghai Disneyland in the coming years. For a complete summary of the cultural missteps applied to the Shanghai Disneyland theme park, see Exhibit 7 in the Appendix.

Will Shanghai Disneyland Succeed or Fail in the Next Few Years?

Off to a rocky start in Shanghai

Looking at Shanghai Disneyland from a broad cultural lens, it appears that the Walt Disney Company has learned in some areas and not from others. For example, in Paris and Hong Kong, the initial work for designs such as attraction names and attraction soundtracks were done in English then translated into the host country’s culture later (Fritz, 2016, p. A.1). This means that some things could be lost in translation or not quite make sense in the host country’s language. In Shanghai Disneyland, the Walt Disney Company did a lot of the design work in the

host country’s language. Fritz (2016, p. A.1), in the Wall Street Journal, quotes a Disney cast member who worked on the design of Shanghai saying,

Every time we come up with a name, we had to make sure it has a whimsical feel, it resonates with Chinese people and it conveys what the experience is... if you just do a straight translation, all of that gets lost

This highlights that, at least in the area of translations, Disney is learning their lesson. But in other areas, the Walt Disney Company still may not have solved their cultural issues.

A prime example of how the Walt Disney Company may not have solved all their cultural issues is a story that was released after Shanghai Disneyland opened of how an attraction was lost in translation for some Chinese guests. While Americans understand what to do in replicas of Davy Crockett’s canoes, it does not seem like Chinese guests understood what to do. Barnes (2016, p. B.1) in a New York Times article explains that,

The Explorer Canoes, called Davy Crockett’s Explorer Canoes in the United States, have been lost in translation for some. ‘When people first got into the canoes they didn’t realize they had to paddle,’ Mr. Iger said. ‘So we had the two cast members paddling, like, 30 people’

The above example highlights that some areas of the park, especially those dealing with aspects rooted in American culture are still lost to guests in the host country. It is examples like this that show that the Walt Disney Company still has a lot to learn culturally from host countries before opening its gates to guests.

There are mixed reviews on how Shanghai Disneyland will do in the next few years. Will it be a success like Tokyo Disneyland or will it barely make a profit year to year like Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland? According to Van Maanen (1992, p. 28), it takes years to draw people to theme parks, which happened in Disneyland and Tokyo Disneyland when they first opened up. Shanghai Disneyland could follow the slow start example of Disneyland and Tokyo Disneyland, but there are a couple roadblocks in its way. There are a couple major news

headlines from the past year that make it seem as though the Walt Disney Company and Shanghai Disneyland may have their work cut out for them. Similar to Hong Kong Disneyland, guests visiting Shanghai do not know many of the Disney characters like guests visiting other Disney parks do. Shanghai Disneyland has an Alice in Wonderland themed maze that was meant to be attractive to guests from China, who do not like thrill rides. But this area of Fantasyland can be “boring” to guests who are “unfamiliar with the land’s ‘central characters like Alice in Wonderland’” (Fritz, 2016, p.A.1). It is hard to attract guests to attractions of characters and storylines they do not know or understand. When this phenomenon is paired with the cultural tensions created by an American theme park in China, revenues and park attendance are negatively affected. This is just one of the many ways the Disney Company has their work cut out for them in Shanghai.

There are a few other indicators that Shanghai Disneyland may not succeed in the coming years. In December 2016, just six months after the park opened, wait times for attractions ranged from 5 minutes to 50 minutes (Harashima, 2016). This may be because, when the park opened, pictures of long lines and complaints from guests waiting in line went viral on Chinese social media, which gave the park a negative reputation that will take some time to change the viewpoint of the Chinese guests (Harashima, 2016). There is also a major area of culture that the Walt Disney Company may not have factored in when designing this theme park: the one-child policy. Unlike Hong Kong Disneyland, mainland China has a policy that limits the number of children each couple can have. The Disney model relies on attracting families with children. But Shanghai Disneyland, unlike previous parks, needs to have an *intergenerational* appeal in order to succeed (Barnes, 2016, p. B.1). Shanghai Disneyland is too similar to its predecessors to succeed on the intergenerational front. These reasons are just a few reasons that have been

mentioned in popular sources since Shanghai Disneyland opened in June of 2016 that indicate that the theme park is off to a rocky start.

Shanghai Disneyland Park Attendance and Park Revenues

Unlike with the other theme parks, there are only predictions for park attendance and park revenues for Shanghai Disneyland. The Walt Disney Company is hesitant to release attendance figures and pertinent data before the official annual report at the end of the fiscal year (Fawcett, 1992, p. 13). Most of the figures in these next few paragraphs are estimates from newspaper articles. There are mixed views on whether the park is on track to meet attendance goals, and since the Walt Disney Company has not released any information it is hard to tell which is correct. Harashima (2016), a writer for the *Nikkei Asian Review*, says the park “drew 4 million visitors in its first four months, and the park is on track to reach its initial year target of 10 million.” Whereas, Linder (2017), a writer for Shanghaiist, an online news source about Shanghai, says that the park “falls short of rosy initial projection... which estimated 15 million visitors over its first year. If attendance continues at its current pace, that year-end number will barely reach over 10 million.” Without official information from the Walt Disney Company, it is hard to tell how the park will do in its first year. But if the park follows the trend from previous parks, attendance numbers are likely to be closer to 10 million guests for the first year.

Furthermore, the Walt Disney Company has not released any official numbers for the revenues of Shanghai Disneyland. Again there are opposing views for the revenues of this park. If the park follows the pattern of parks before it, “analysts expect the Shanghai Disneyland theme park and its two hotels to be unprofitable in their first few years but ultimately to boost international theme-park business’s bottom line” (Fritz, 2016, p.B.1). Whereas Shanghaiist

(2016), says that predictions for profit have been released by the Walt Disney Company and are “estimated at 24 billion yuan (\$3.65 billion) annually. That’s a combination of both ticket revenue, estimated at 4 billion yuan per year, and profits from merchandise sales, which will garner the most dough at 20 billion yuan.” This seems like a lot of revenue to bring in, but if guests are not visiting the park and spending money, the park will not make this much revenue.

A more recent and more realistic prediction from the Walt Disney Company is that Shanghai Disneyland will break even in 2017 (Pelts, 2017). This is very different from the prediction that the park will bring in almost \$3.65 billion in its opening year. This prediction also seems more accurate based on the information that has been released about the park. But these are only predictions. Even though there are predictions that Shanghai Disneyland will make a profit and break the mold of previous Disney international theme parks, no one will truly know until the Walt Disney Company releases the financial statements for Shanghai Disneyland’s first year of operation in the summer of 2017.

The Walt Disney Company and various analysts are not sure about the consumer habits of people from mainland China. Fritz (2016, p. B.1), a writer for *The Wall Street Journal*, comments that “it also isn’t clear how much Chinese consumers would be willing to spend on food, toys, and other concessions during visits.” In addition to attracting guests to visit the park more than once, an important component of the Disney parks revenue model are guests buying food and souvenirs in the parks. If guests are not buying food and souvenirs in the park, the park does not make a lot of money. Since the Walt Disney Company and its analysts are not sure of the spending habits of guests from mainland China, the predicted revenue of \$3.65 billion should be viewed as a generous estimate until more information is released.

Did the Walt Disney Company learn their lesson before building Shanghai Disneyland?

The Walt Disney Company has had four decades to correct the mistakes it has made since Tokyo Disneyland opened its doors. Xu’s (2012, p.53) dissertation titled “Cultural Practices & Communications of Disney’s Worldwide Parks” explains that Disney in, "its early days of international expansion Disney made the mistakes that many trans-national companies have made: to make assumptions about the transferability of their management and communication models, which frequently failed to take cultural differences into consideration.” After four decades, the Walt Disney Company should have learned from their mistakes and realized that a universalistic mindset is what is wrong with their international theme parks, not their business decisions. Shanghai Disneyland looks like it will be a repeat of Disneyland Paris or Hong Kong Disneyland where the Walt Disney Company only made small changes before implementing a new park in a new host country, and for this reason, it does not look like Disney has truly learned its lesson that their problems abroad stem from cultural issues, not bad business choices.

An important question to ask when analyzing if Shanghai Disneyland will succeed or fail in the next few years is, “Has the Walt Disney Company learned to balance its American based product and the culture of the host country the park is in?” The answer to that question at the current moment is no. The Walt Disney Company over the past four decades has learned to incorporate more of the host country’s culture as it builds each theme park but not enough to describe it as a balance. Shanghai Disneyland incorporates both elements from Chinese culture like feng shui in the design of the park, but there are still aspects of the park that are still fundamentally American like the service with a smile expectation. Chinese culture is more represented throughout the Shanghai theme park which shows progress by the Walt Disney Company, but it is not enough to call it a balance. The greater representation of Chinese culture

will help the Shanghai theme park in attendance numbers and revenues so the park is more successful than Paris or Hong Kong, but not enough for the park to truly “succeed”.

From a cultural perspective and analyzing the past international Disney theme parks, Shanghai Disneyland will not succeed. Shanghai Disneyland will follow the pattern set by Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland where the park will initially do poorly, the Walt Disney Company will make minor changes to “fix” their mistakes, and the park will do better for a few years, but then the park will experience declines in revenues and park attendance. The Walt Disney Company has not learned to adapt to host country’s culture to be successful in yet another distinct culture. With each park, the Walt Disney Company fixes the evident mistakes from the previous parks, but Disney has not learned to solve the overall problem; copy and pasting an American theme park into a different culture and assuming that, since it works in the United States, it will work in other countries. The Walt Disney Company needs to find a balance between selling American culture in the form of Disney magic and adapting to the host country’s culture. Once they find a balance between a universalistic mindset and a particularistic mindset, their theme parks will start to do better (assuming that they do not make major business mistakes again such as the assumption of debt in Disneyland Paris).

Significance

At the center of the global versus local dilemma that multinational companies face appears to be the issue of cultural differences between the home and the host culture as the analysis of Disney’s international parks seems to suggest. The Walt Disney Company has learned in Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong that the culture of the host country needs to be considered when designing international theme parks. If culture is not included when designing,

building, and implementing a theme park, then the attendance and revenues of the park may be lower than expected because guests are deterred from returning to the park after their first visit. This goes against the Disney model which relies on guests visiting the parks again and again. Focusing on being culturally sensitive can help improve their business practices to help increase attendance and revenues in international theme parks.

This paper is also significant because it highlights that culture is not universal. There are differences in beliefs and values which helps to explain why all company services and products are not universally accepted when they are placed in the host country. Cultures may share similar aspects of culture but each culture is unique to the society in which it was formed so companies cannot assume that if the host country shares similar aspects of culture what works in the home country will work in the host country. This paper shows that phenomenon using the example of Disney theme parks, which can be used as an example of a hard lesson learned for other companies who want to become global.

This paper also can help to highlight where the Walt Disney Company may need to focus culturally in future theme parks which in turn can create better practices for itself and other American companies with international operations. They need to move away from a universalistic mindset and start adapting to local cultures. The areas they may want to focus on include high and low context cultures, neutral and emotional cultures, uncertainty avoidance, and indulgence. Focusing on these areas can lead to better practices in both international and domestic theme parks. These better practices can create a better guest experience for guests visiting theme parks from the host country and from around the world.

Lastly, this paper is significant because it would be one of the first to analyze the use of culture in designing, building, and implementing Shanghai Disneyland. The park has only been open for about a year now so there is not a lot of scholarship or cases studies on the park yet. This paper will help other researchers understand the culture at Shanghai Disneyland and where the park succeeded and failed culturally. From there, researchers will be able to further analyze the use of culture in the theme park as more information is released. Also, future researchers will be able to track the changes made by the Walt Disney Company to address the “failures” of the park like researchers have done with Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. The first limitation is with the information about Shanghai Disneyland. This theme park opened up less than a year ago in the summer of 2016. For this reason, there is not a lot of scholarly information about the park. The researcher had to use popular sources like local newspapers and websites, blog posts from the Walt Disney Company, and U.S. news outlets as their research for the Shanghai Disneyland portion of this paper. Since the Walt Disney Company does not release park attendance and revenues until the end of the fiscal year, a lot of the numbers used are predictions from these popular sources. This limits the researcher’s analysis of the Shanghai Disneyland.

The second limitation is with the information released by the Walt Disney Company. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Disney does not release information regularly about how their international theme parks are doing. The researcher had to rely on previous scholarly sources for a lot of this information. The researcher also could not find a lot of information released about the Tokyo Disneyland Resort from the Disney Company. This limits what the researcher can

discuss in this study to information Disney makes openly available and the information provided by previous scholars in this area.

The last limitation is with the data collection techniques. The researcher used convenience sampling to find interviewees for this project. The researcher interviewed friends and colleagues for this project. The researcher only interviewed five people. Thus, the sample size and the people interviewed limit the scope of the project, and consequently, the variances of viewpoints for the project. Further research must be conducted and more information must be known about the Shanghai Disneyland theme park before the conclusions in this paper can be confirmed.

Conclusion

Culture is very important to consider when deciding to export a product or service abroad. It is important to understand that what works in the home country will not necessarily work in the host country. Unfortunately, the Walt Disney Company has been learning this lesson the hard way at what seems like a snail pace over the last four decades. The Walt Disney Company has learned that while standardization makes good business sense, in theory, it is not practical when applied to services and products in unique and different cultures.

The lessons learned from this paper can be applied to other theme parks as Universal Studios and Six Flags are planning to open theme parks in China in the next few years (Wall, 2016, p.1). These two companies will be able to benefit from reactive globalization as they have watched the Walt Disney Company and the mistakes they have made in China in the past decade. Other consumer based industries like food service and retail can also learn from the mistakes Disney has made these past four decades in order to provide better guest services in Europe and

Asia. The Walt Disney Company has its work cut out for them as researchers, scholars, investors, consumers, and Disney executives wait for the end of Shanghai first year of operations to see whether or not the five billion dollar experiment was a success. Until then, only time will tell if the Walt Disney Company will ever truly learn their lesson that bad business decisions are not the root of their international theme park issues—culture is.

Appendix:

Exhibit 1:

Park Revenues and Attendance Tables

All revenues are expressed in US dollars and negative revenues are expressed in parentheses. All revenues were converted to US dollars using information from the Foreign Exchange Rates page from the Federal Reserve.

Park Attendance:

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987		2014	2015	2016
Tokyo Disneyland Park Attendance	9.9 million	10.01 million	10.68 million	10.67 million	11.98 million		31.38* million	16.6 million	30* million

Note. Data from park attendance table for Tokyo Disneyland taken from Tokyo guest statistics (2017) and Linder (2017).

*Attendance figure includes both attendance for Tokyo Disneyland Park and Tokyo Disney Sea Park

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		2014	2015	2016
Disneyland Paris Park Attendance	6.58 million	9.8 million	8.8 million	10.7 million	11.7 million		14.2 million	14.8 million	13.4 million

Note. Data from the park attendance table for Disneyland Paris taken from Euro S.C.A (1993, 1995, 1996, 2015, and 2016), Legislative Council Secretariat (1999), and Guyot (2001).

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009		2014	2015	2016
Hong Kong Disneyland Park Attendance	< 5.6 million	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	4.6 million		7.5 million	6.8 million	6.1 million

Note. Data from the park attendance table for Hong Kong Disneyland taken from Hong Kong Disneyland Business Review (2010, 2014, 2015, and 2016), Fowler & Marr (2006), and Fritz (2016).

*Corporate website for Hong Kong Disneyland does not have annual reports posted for any year before 2009.

	2016
Shanghai Disneyland Park Attendance	10 – 15 million*

*Estimated and forecasted by different sources from Harashima (2016) and Linder (2017).

Park Revenues:

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987		2014	2015	2016
Tokyo Disneyland Revenues	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*		N/A*	N/A*	N/A*

*The Oriental Land Company does not break down its revenues per segment so the specific revenues for TDR are unknown.

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		2014	2015	2016
Disneyland Paris Revenues	(87.7) million	(970.4) million	(326.79) million	20.7 million	36.7 million		(90.04) million	(91.29) million	(763.48) million

Note. Data from the revenues table for Disneyland Paris taken from Euro S.C.A (1993, 1995, 1996, 2015, and 2016), Legislative Council Secretariat (1999), and Guyot (2001).

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009		2014	2015	2016
Hong Kong Disneyland Revenues	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	N/A*	(169.68) million		42.78 million	(19.1) million	(22.04) million

Note. Data from the park attendance table for Hong Kong Disneyland taken from Hong Kong Disneyland Business Review (2010, 2014, 2015, and 2016), Fowler & Marr (2006) and Fritz (2016).

*Corporate website for Hong Kong Disneyland does not have annual reports posted for any year before 2009.

	2016
Shanghai Disneyland Revenues	\$3.65* million

*Estimated combined revenues of park tickets and merchandise sales from Shanghaiist (2016).

Exhibit 2:

Interview Questions

Ice Breaker: What is your favorite attraction at the park in which you work(ed)?

1. Which theme park do (did) you work in and what is (was) your role?
2. Describe the use of culture in the park. Did it seem American? Did it represent the host country’s culture?

3. How did guests from the host country feel about the theme park? Did they want to come back or were they deterred from the park?
4. What areas of the theme park (attraction names, attraction design, layout of the park, food, merchandise, etc.) did you notice account for the host country’s culture?
5. Describe the theming (attractions, buildings, music, costumes) of the following lands: Main Street, USA., Frontierland, and Adventureland? How do they fit in with the host country’s culture? Do they make sense in the host country?
6. Are there any attractions that you feel do not make sense in the host country? If so, why? If not, why not?
7. How do you feel about Disney’s service with a smile attitude? Does it make sense in the host country? How do people from the host country feel about it?
8. Do you think the idea of the theme park work’s in the host country?
9. Is there a difference between American family values and the host country’s family values? (For example, Americans are willing to take their children out of school to visit Disney or the fact that Disney is a family park)
10. Does this difference in family values affect the theme park? (Think in terms of attendance and revenues)
11. Is there a difference in consumer culture between American and people from the host country?
12. Does this difference in consumer culture affect the theme park? (Think in terms of attendance and revenues)
13. Overall, does the theme park feel like it represents American culture, the host country’s culture, or a mixture of both? Why do you feel that way?

Concluding Question: Who else should I talk to learn more about my questions?

Exhibit 3:

Themed Lands Concept: Lack of Cultural Fit

Themed Land	Fit in other countries		
	France	Japan	Hong Kong
Main Street, USA. – in USA each town has a main thoroughfare; this depicts the nostalgia of small towns in America.	French, Chinese and Japanese towns do not have a main street so the concept does not have a significant meaning in these countries. This land does not invoke the same feeling of nostalgia as it does in the US.		
Frontierland – depiction of the American west and manifest destiny.	Going west to explore and expand is not part of the history of these countries, so the land is out of place in these parks.		
	Modified to fit French and European view of the American west French are a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which does not fit the theme of the land.	Modified to fit Japanese view of the American west; becomes Westernland. Japanese are a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which does not fit the theme of the land.	N.A.
Adventureland -themed around exploring the jungles of foreign lands. Scholars criticize this land for its hints of colonialism and imperialism.	Disney removed Jungle Cruise from DLP since the French do not like reminders of their imperialistic past. French are a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which does not fit the theme of the land.	Japan and China did not participate in Western colonialism or imperialism so the theme of exploring jungles is lost to the Japanese and Chinese.	
		Japanese are a high uncertainty avoidance culture, which does not fit the theme of the land.	Chinese culture is a low uncertainty avoidance culture so the theme of the land is lost to them since they are okay with the unknown.

Note. Data from the themed lands concept table taken from Hofstede (2001), Hall & Hall (1990), Philips (2002), Brannen (1992), Marling (1997), Toyoda (2014), Eisner & Schwartz (1998), Luthans & Doh (2015), WDW Cast Member 2 (2017), Fung & Lee (2009), and Van Maanen (1992).

Exhibit 4:

Classic Attractions: Lost in Translation

Attraction	Translation in other countries		
USA	France	Japan	Hong Kong
<p>Pirates of the Caribbean – Boat ride through an island as pirates pillage and plunder.</p> <p>The attraction has been updated to include characters from the film franchise.</p>	<p>Recognizable characters because of the film franchise.</p> <p>French can relate to western pirates because it is a part of their history.</p>	<p>Recognizable characters because of film franchise.</p> <p>Guests cannot identify with the western concept of pirates.</p>	<p>N.A.</p>
<p>Enchanted Tiki Room – Polynesian theme with singing birds.</p>	<p>N.A.</p>	<p>Updated with characters from <i>Lilo and Stitch</i></p> <p>In Japan, adults do not identify with the theme younger identify with Stitch.</p>	<p>N.A.</p>
<p>Haunted Mansion- Ghosts have gathered in a mansion as their final place of rest</p>	<p>Phantom Manor- Follows the story of a bride who continues to murder her husbands in the American west.</p> <p>This attraction has been modified in France to focus on the French love of American west rather than the idea of death.</p>	<p>Ghosts are not understandable characters in Japan because they sing in English and dance to the original music from the Disneyland attraction. (Raz, 1999, p.47).</p>	<p>Mystic Manor- Manor turned into a museum that is haunted by spirits.</p> <p>This attraction has been modified in China to show respect for the dead.</p>
<p>The Jungle Cruise- Boat ride through the world’s longest rivers where the Skipper tells</p>	<p>N.A.</p>	<p>Puns are translated and adapted into Japanese and Chinese to fit with the style of humor in each country.</p>	

puns throughout the cruise.			
Country Bear Jamboree- Bears from the “country” sing to entertain guests. Some songs are wholesome while others mention sex, violence, and alcohol.	N.A.	Japanese cannot identify with the idea of “country” creating a cultural barrier.	N.A.
It’s Small World- Boat ride where guests are taken across the six continents to learn that it is indeed a small world after all.	N.A.	The use of cultural stereotypes in this attraction may be offensive to guests in the host country riding this attraction.	

Note. Data for the classic attractions table taken from Fung & Lee (2009), Raz (1999), Toyoda (2014), Van Maanen (1992), Attractions Tokyo Disneyland (n.d.), and Miller (2007).

Exhibit 5:

Service with a Smile

Service with a Smile: Smiling Does Not Mean Good Customer Service

Service Expectations	Fit in other countries		
USA	France	Japan	Hong Kong
<p>Guests in the US and the Walt Disney Company expect Disney cast members to deliver service with a smile.</p> <p>US is an emotional and low context culture.</p>	<p>Cast members do not like to smile continuously; guests feel like they are cast members think they are idiots since they are smiling at them.</p> <p>French is an emotional culture and moderate in context; even though similar to the US, the French reserve smiling to close friends and family.</p>	<p>Service with a smile expectations works well in Japan.</p> <p>Japanese is high context and neutral culture but universalism and collectivism overshadow context and neutral culture which allows service with a smile to work in Japan.</p>	<p>Guests from Hong Kong view smiling Disney cast members with suspicion.</p> <p>The culture of Hong Kong is neutral so service with a smile does not work well in Hong Kong</p>

Note. Data for the service with a smile table taken from Hall & Hall (1990), Trompenaars (2003), Luthans & Doh (2015), DLP Cast Member 2 (2017), Curwen (1995), Forman (1998), and Matusitz (2011).

Exhibit 6:

Family Values and Consumer Culture

Family Values and Consumer Culture: What Happens in the US Does Not Happen in the Host Country

	Fit in Other Countries		
USA	France	Japan	Hong Kong
Family Values- Parents are willing to take their children out of school for family vacations at Disneyland or Disney World American culture is a culture of indulgence	French, Japanese, and Chinese parents are less willing to take their children out of school to visit a theme park. These cultures are more restrained than the US so taking their children out of school to visit a theme park can be considered indulgent and could be frowned upon by society.		
Consumer Culture- Americans are willing to buy a lot of souvenirs and spend a lot of money at Disney’s theme parks American culture is a culture of indulgence	French do not spend a lot on souvenirs in the park and are more likely to picnic than buy food in the park. French culture is in the middle of the indulgence spectrum but mixed with high uncertainty avoidance makes them less indulgent.	Japanese love American culture so they justify their spending habits at Tokyo Disneyland. Japanese is a culture of restraint.	Chinese do not spend a lot on souvenirs and are more likely to bring in their own food than buy food in the park. Chinese culture is a culture of restraint so they are less likely to splurge on souvenirs and food.

Note. Data from the family values and consumer culture table taken from Hofstede (2001), Tai & Lau (2009), Toyoda (2014), Spencer (1995), Brannen (2004), Bohas (2014), DLP Cast Member 3 (2017), WDW Cast Member 2 (2017), and Fritz (2016).

Exhibit 7:

Cultural Missteps applied to Shanghai Disneyland

Themed Lands Concept: Lack of Cultural Fit

Attraction	Fit in other countries
USA	China
Main Street, USA. – in USA each town has a main thoroughfare; this depicts the nostalgia of	Modified to Mickey Avenue in Shanghai; more modern façade than previous parks

small towns in America.	This change does not tie the land to a specific time and place which will not discourage guests who do not understand the history behind the land.
Frontierland – depiction of the American west and manifest destiny.	N.A.
Adventureland -themed around exploring the jungles of foreign lands. Scholars criticize this land for its hints of colonialism and imperialism.	Modified to Adventure Isle; undertones of imperialism and colonialism are erased. Land focuses more on the broad idea of “adventure” to appeal to low certainty avoidance culture of the Chinese.

Note. Data for themed lands concept table taken from Hofstede (2001), Hall & Hall (1990), Shanghai Disneyland (n.d.), Bland et al. (2016), and Shanghai Disneyland (2017).

Classic Attractions: Lost in Translation

Attraction	Translation in other countries
USA	China
Pirates of the Caribbean – Boat ride through an island as pirates pillage and plunder. The attraction has been updated to include characters from the film franchise.	Updated to include characters from the film franchise. This attraction includes less of the original storyline from the Disneyland park. Chinese guests can identify with the characters from the film even though they cannot identify with the idea of Western pirates.
Enchanted Tiki Room – Polynesian theme with singing birds.	N.A.
Haunted Mansion - Ghosts have gathered in a mansion as their final place of rest.	N.A.
The Jungle Cruise - Boat ride through the world’s longest rivers where the Skipper tells puns throughout the cruise.	N.A.

Country Bear Jamboree- Bears from the “country” sing to entertain guests. Some songs are wholesome while others mention of sex, violence, and alcohol.	N.A.
It’s Small World- Boat ride where guests are taken across the six continents to learn that it is indeed a small world after all.	N.A.

Note. Data from the classic attraction table taken from Shanghai Disneyland (2017).

Service with a Smile: Smiling Does Not Mean Good Customer Service

Service Expectations	Fit in other countries
USA	China
<p>Guests in the US and the Walt Disney Company expect Disney cast members to deliver service with a smile.</p> <p>The US is an emotional and low context culture.</p>	<p>The researcher predicts that the service with a smile expectation will not work well in Shanghai Disneyland as the Chinese will view smiling cast members with suspicion and that smiling like in French culture is reserved for friends and family.</p> <p>Chinese is an emotional and high context culture.</p>

Note. Data from the service with a smile table taken from Hall & Hall (1990) and Trompenaars (2003).

Family Values and Consumer Culture: What Happens in the US Does Not Happen in the Host Country

	Fit in Other Countries
USA	China
Family Values- Parents are willing to take their children out of school for family vacations at Disneyland or Disney World.	<p>Chinese parents value education and are less likely to take their children out of school to visit a theme park.</p> <p>Chinese culture is a culture of restraint so taking children out of school to visit theme park can be viewed as being indulgent.</p>

American culture is a culture of indulgence.	
<p>Consumer Culture- Americans are willing to buy a lot of souvenirs and spend a lot of money at Disney’s theme parks.</p> <p>American culture is a culture of indulgence.</p>	<p>Chinese guests will only buy a one or two souvenirs in the park and will bring food into the park to eat.</p> <p>Chinese culture is a culture of restraint so they will not spend a lot of money on food and souvenirs in the theme park.</p>

Note. Data from the family values and consumer culture tables taken from Hostede (2001).

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