

Serving as a Sociocultural Practice: An Ethnography of Luxury Hotels

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Consistent with calls for a deeper understanding of the cross-cultural differences in the provision of services (Forrer and Sollberger, 2007; Chan 2010), we want to better understand what serving means in different cultures.

Influenced by scholarship attending to interactions as they happen in situ (Goffman 1968; Otis 2011; Sherman 2007), we focus on service interactions in three branches of a luxury hotel chain in France, China and India. Building from extensive ethnographic fieldwork including several weeks of participant observation in each hotel, we provide a better understanding of the practices, norms, understandings and embodiments that constitute luxury service.

Our findings contribute new insights on the class-based nature of service interactions. While our research is consistent with previous work demonstrating that luxury servicescapes reproduce inequalities (Dion and Borraz 2017; Sherman 2007; Üstüner and Thompson 2012), we also note the importance of macrostructural determinants and cultural repertoires in mediating service interactions. Rather than a closed and standardized system that reproduces itself through time and place, the luxury hotel is a permeable and dynamic system that is intimately tied to broader social-cultural dynamics. In the end, we show that serving is a profoundly dynamic sociocultural practice.

Biography

Julien Cayla is a Research Fellow at the Institute on Asian Consumer Insight, an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Nanyang Business School (Singapore) and a Visiting Professor at Kedge Business School (France). Most recently Professor Cayla has been involved in a new research program on service interactions in different cultural contexts. His work has been published in outlets such as the *Journal of Consumer Research*, the *Journal of Marketing*, *Organization Studies* and *MIT Sloan Management Review*.