

# ASIAN HOTEL & CATERING TIMES

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## SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

Creating a better hospitality industry for women

## LOCKED AND LOADED

Focus on door technology and safes

## TOP OF HIS CLASS

Profile – professor Kaye Chon, dean, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management Hong Kong

Hong Kong SAR	HK\$50
China	RMB50
Singapore	S\$15
Malaysia	RM30
Thailand	B1300
Rest of Asia	US\$10



# YOUR INDUSTRY NEEDS YOU

Leading hospitality industry figures discuss issues in F&B recruitment

## A changing scene in China

**René J.M. Schillings,**  
managing director,  
TOP Hoteliers



The choice and quality of restaurants outside of international hotels has taken a huge flight in China, in the past decade. The major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are no longer a culinary backwater when it comes to free-standing restaurants and while at first, about a decade ago, they were copying concepts from world cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo, Dubai, London or New York, the last 10 years certainly saw that in China we could find some of the most amazing restaurants.

Internationally trained chefs and F&B managers who came to China for a job often saw the potential and opened a restaurant. Foreign and Chinese investors saw the potential and created new places, hiring again talents from overseas and giving Chinese F&B enthusiasts a chance to discover a whole new world.

Certainly in the pre-financial crisis years and lead up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, it seemed that world-renowned chefs had to have a restaurant in China as well. Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore were just in that line of world cities together with Tokyo, Dubai, Las Vegas etc. but the more daring were looking to add Beijing and Shanghai as new names on their list.

New money, a thriving economy, and a population that was learning how to drink fine wines, nibble on French cheese or discover cuisine from Mexico to Australia and was rushing to get a seat at the hottest new tables in town, next to so many French, Italian and Japanese restaurants, either authentic ones or a new twist to

the traditional restaurants, in direct competition to what's usually found in international hotels.

The local magazines targeting expat populations were half filled by restaurant reviews, new restaurant openings announcement and new chef arrivals. However, lately, perhaps geared by soaring rents and the effects of the austerity measures by the Chinese government to curb exorbitant spending by government officials the mushrooming growth of more and more exclusive restaurants has been dampened.

It is also a matter of just too many of the same and everybody jumping on a bandwagon, which then becomes simply overloaded. Recently we see that long-established restaurants with a loyal clientele and admired in the media for their for outstanding food, are nevertheless closing their doors.

The operators cannot equate their culinary success with economic viability. While in some cities, new hip restaurants keep opening a (second) venue in new CBDs or newly developed food and beverage streets, some of the older haunts have to make way for new development.

Further we see a strong trend for freestanding restaurants to be replaced by standard concepts, operated by restaurant groups, be they local or international. That means less distinction in the restaurant scene and seeing the same brands with the same food menu in different cities in the region. Just as one sees the McDonald's and Starbucks concepts on more and more corners, one can now also find a favourite and trusted restaurant name in more locations.

It does render the F&B scene blander and less unique. However, for employees working in these standardised, often franchised concepts, it can provide more stable employment. Not only do these restaurant groups possess years of experience in operating the restaurant business, as opposed to the odd chef who starts his own restaurant, they are also often backed by a more professional structure of management, operating more restaurants of a similar concept in a region.

These can in some cases prove to be more efficient and profitable than, for example, one hotel operating five to seven restaurants managed by an F&B director, executive chef and their team.

This is especially the case when the total focus is on restaurant management, versus having the F&B as a necessity in a hotel where

room revenue is the main moneymaker. In the recent two years, TOP Hoteliers has seen an increase in franchise-concept restaurant brands among our clientele, looking to hire talent to operate their stores in ever new areas.

They are either worldwide established brands or some locally developed ones, often a copy of a single successful restaurant, as well as concepts that had an origin in other markets, now expanding

internationally and choosing China as a place to grow fast.

*René J.M. Schillings holds a Master's degree in International Tourism Development from the London Metropolitan University. After a career as hotel manager in Asia and other continents he now heads an executive search firm in greater China and Asia, TOP Hoteliers, which was the first hospitality recruitment and executive search firm to open offices in the People's Republic of China*