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Why Chinese international students gamble: Behavioral decision making and its impact on identity construction

Abstract

This article explores the decision making processes involved when Chinese international students' (CIS) decide whether or not to gamble, as well as the impact that such behavior have on the construction of their identities in a new sociocultural environment. Two waves of narrative interviews were conducted with 15 CIS who self-reported as having gambling problems at the time of interview, or at some stage in their lives but had since recovered. The findings revealed that pre-existing beliefs and experiences, and various cultural schemas were closely linked to the participants' decision making processes. The findings also showed that the participants' sense of self-worth and self-respect became compromised as a result of their problematic gambling. The participants assigned to themselves extremely negative self-images, for example, 'unfilial', 'unworthy', 'worthless', 'prisoner', 'a burden', 'hopeless' and so on, that dominated their whole sense of self.

Key words: Gambling, Asian, acculturation, identity, cultural schema, youths

Introduction

Gambling is defined as an act of staking something of value on the outcome of an uncertain contingency, and hence a quintessential form of risk-taking behavior (Powell, Hardoon, Derevensky, & Gupta, 1999). Such gambling activities can range from nominal involvement (e.g., buying a two-dollar Lotto Scratchy Card every Christmas) to being totally immerse in it (e.g., gambling at the casino every day). At many points along this continuum, people can experience problems associated with their gambling, although more serious difficulties tend to be experienced by those who gamble more frequently and wager higher amounts. Generally speaking, *problem gambling* is characterized by a person as having difficulties in limiting money towards, or time spent on, gambling. This then results in adverse consequences for these gamblers, as well as their family, friends, and other associates. Some individuals are defined as 'at risk' gamblers, which potentially leaves them vulnerable to excessive gambling in the future (Volberg, Nysse-Carris, & Gerstein, 2006).

Research has suggested that CIS are at risk of developing such gambling-related problems. Thomas and Thomas (2006), for example, found that a significantly greater proportion of Chinese students were at risk of problem gambling than their non-Chinese counterparts. Goodyear-Smith, Arroll and Tse (2004) also discovered that, compared to domestic students, more Asian students, especially those who were Chinese, admitted to feeling that their gambling became challenging for them to control and reported needing assistance to reduce their gambling.

Theoretical frameworks: decision making, identity, acculturation and cultural schema

The decision whether to gamble or not is influenced by a myriad of factors (Thomas et al., 2011). Research suggests that positive and negative perceptions of gambling (Kim & Lee, 2004) and gambling expectancies (Spurrier & Blaszczynski, 2013; Wong & Tsang, 2013) are important factors that motive people, in particular youth, to gamble. Gambling expectancies are beliefs about the occurrence of certain outcomes as a result of gambling (Wang & Tsang, 2012). Wickwire et al. (2010) identified five expectancy domains—material gain, negative affect, positive self-evaluation, negative social consequences, and parent disapproval. Applying this approach to Chinese adolescent gamblers, Wang and Tsang (2012) instead identified an

alternative five-factor model. These five factors were relational cost, social benefit, material gain, being out of control and money loss. Wand and Tsang argued that in contrast to Western adolescents, Chinese adolescents did not expect gambling to make them feel bad about themselves or lower their self-esteem. They mostly perceived gambling as providing opportunities to impress and gain others' approval. Consequently, these gambling expectancies reflect the notion that gambling decision-making is associated with relational and social learning experiences (Fiedler, 2008).

Using both the studies of Spurrier and Blaszczynski (2013) as well as that of Wong and Tsang (2013) as a conceptual platform, this present in-depth, theory-driven qualitative study investigates the impact of decision making on identity construction through an investigation of why CIS initially gamble, and continue to gamble, even in the face of deleterious consequences. To that end, the theories of identity, acculturation and cultural schema will be employed as conceptual frameworks for our analysis. It should be noted that this study does not only seek to uncover the decision making process involved in drawing CIS into a spiral of problem gambling, but also on how the decision to gamble has downstream effects on the students' identities in their host society. The importance of such an examination is clear: from a cultural perspective of behavioral change, it is imperative to develop culturally responsive interventions in order to more effectively impact upon the decision making processes that lead to problematic behavior among this highly vulnerable risk-group (Tse, Yu, Rossen, & Wang, 2010).

Research has confirmed that a gambler's sense of self may contribute to his/her decision to gamble or not. Ohtsuka and Ohtsuka (2010) found that those who gambled in skill-based gambling activities (e.g., blackjack) enjoyed recognition and respect from their fellow gamblers, which boosted their self-esteem/self-importance. This in turn, motivated them to continue to gamble. The concept of identity is thus central to understanding not only the problem, but more importantly, how potential solutions may be crafted to address the gambler's decision making processes. Although there is much literature concerning the impact problem gambling has on a gambler's identity, little research however has been conducted to specifically explore the circumstances under which some international students decide to gamble, and how they construct

their identities in new social and cultural surroundings when they gamble excessively. This article seeks to address this research gap.

Psychologists have argued that in Chinese culture, societal contexts and social relationships influences a person's decision making, and shapes who and what he/she is (Bond, 2010). When CIS relocate from China to another country, their decision making, and aspects of their identity, invariably change, albeit to varying degrees. They undergo a process of acculturation whereby psychological adaptations occur as a result of the cross-cultural transition given the psychological stresses associated with adjustments to a new cultural milieu. Acculturation may result in changes in the behavior, identity, values and attitudes, of a person (for details on acculturation, see Sam & Berry, 2006). Consequently, negotiating between acculturative stress and traditional ways of life can be very disruptive and lead to sub-optimal behavioral responses such as problematic gambling (Marsella & Yamada, 2007).

Geographical space can similarly fashion a person's identity and decision making processes. Place-based identity is often used to explore the mechanisms that explain why people invest emotional, personal and shared meanings in particular physical locations such as a casino, and in the process re-create themselves (Li, Hodgetts, & Ho, 2010) to complement this spatial environment. One's identity can thus be constructed by not only situational-based experiences (as highlighted previously) but also by place-based ones. For example, when a student gambles in a casino, he/she is more likely to define him/herself as a 'gambler' or a 'VIP guest' rather than a 'student' (which they primarily are).

Furthermore, this study employs the concept of cultural schema to introduce into this analysis a whole range of traditions and beliefs that informs one's decision-making processes when he/she is confronted with familiar scenarios. According to Nishida (1999), when a person enters a familiar situation, a repository of pre-existing knowledge containing contextually appropriate behavioral responses can be accessed and retrieved. This familiar and pre-acquainted knowledge is called a schema. Cultural schemas for social interaction are essentially cognitive structures that contain knowledge for face-to-face interactions in a person's cultural environment. These are

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generalized collections of knowledge of past experiences that are organized into related knowledge groups; and used to cognitively guide people's behaviors in familiar situations. The cultural schemas provide a prototypical conceptual framework that is culturally central to perceiving, organizing, interpreting, remembering, representing, making references about, and acting, in the world (Garro, 2000).

In the context of gambling, there may be very different cultural traditions and belief systems influencing people's behavior and perceptions about games of chance and the unseen forces that control people's life outcomes. For example, Chinese culture has distinctive notions of fate, chance, luck, probability, risk and control over one's life (Bond, 2010). While Chinese gamblers regard winning as indicative of a person's inherent goodness, they often associate their losses to poor supernatural preconditions such as ill fate, bad luck or tragic predestined interpersonal affinity (Papineau, 2005).

The above discussion suggests that the CIS' identities are formed and given meaning in a particular social context. This proposition is epistemologically embedded in symbolic interactionism which seeks to uncover meanings that people create and construct during social interaction. Symbolic interactionism is the view that all knowledge, and thus all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices and constructed in and out of reactions/responses between human beings and their world. In other words, all knowledge is developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. In the symbolic interactionist view, meaning is not discovered but constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Li, 2013). We therefore argue here that social contexts and social relationships shape who and what the CIS are. Aspects of their selves change when contexts and relationships change. Identity is thus not only their own construction of the self, but the social construction of the self.

The present study

The present study employs a narrative approach that focuses on exploring the subjective meanings that the CIS hold about their gambling behavior. Although these subjective views may

not necessarily be widely shared or representative of the CIS community-at-large, they nevertheless represent the perceptions of some members within this group. Their narratives will therefore provide us with authentic, realistic and nuanced insights into what these problematic or pathological gamblers are experiencing on a day-to-day basis (Ohtsuka & Ohtsuka, 2010).

To illustrate what motivates CIS to gamble and the impact of their decision making on their identity, this study will explore: a) the various forms of gambling that these CIS were involved in; b) the circumstances under which these student participants commenced gambling in New Zealand; and c) the impact of excessive gambling on the participants' identity construction.

Method

Participants

The participants were recruited from Auckland and Hamilton, where there were casinos. The participants included CIS who self-reported to have gambling-related problems at the time of interview, or to have experienced gambling-related problems in the past but now had recovered. This widened the focus of our study to include individuals who were currently experiencing gambling-related problems, as well as those who had at some point in the past resolved them. Auckland was chosen as a research site because it is an urban area with relatively high concentrations of CIS and has well established problem gambling services specifically catered for the Asian communities residing therein. Hamilton was selected because it represents a more typical medium size community in New Zealand, with fewer services for Asian gamblers who are addicted to gambling.

Prior to the interviews, community consultation was carried out to provide information about this study to a range of Chinese community groups. Ten organizations (e.g., Chinese churches, language schools, polytechnics and universities) were approached to recruit potential participants. Only one potential participant emerged from these groups. This reflected a difficulty in recruiting participants or of conducting a gambling study through such public channels. In tandem with this approach, a snow-balling technique was employed. The first author emailed the information concerning the study to her personal contacts who were CIS to recruit participants

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and thereafter asked these initial participants to forward the information to their friends. Fourteen participants were recruited through this means.

The sample consisted of five females and 10 males, ranging in age from 20 to 41 years (M = 25.67, SD=4.79). With regard to their educational background, eight participants were studying in universities, six in polytechnics, and one in a private tertiary educational institution. Participants' length of residence in New Zealand ranged from one to seven years (M=3.89; SD=1.85). As for their marital status, nine participants were single, three were married and three were in de facto relationships.

Material

The guidelines for the semi-structured interviews consisted of two sections. The first section concerned the collection of demographical data (e.g., age, gender, education, marriage status) and the participants' gambling experiences in China and New Zealand with a focus on what motivated them to gamble. The second section sought to uncover the tensions, costs, benefits and consequences of their gambling, as well as their efforts, where applicable, to change their gambling behavior.

Procedures and analysis

Ethical approval was granted by the Department of Psychology's Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato, New Zealand. All the participants took part in two interview sessions from March to November 2006, with an interval of six months between them. At the beginning of each interview, confidentiality was reaffirmed, and permission to record the interview was sought by asking the participants to sign a consent form. To ensure their continuing anonymity, pseudonyms were used in this article. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours. Either Mandarin or Cantonese was used in the interviews depending on which the participants preferred. The interviews were conducted by the first author who is competent in both languages.

The interviews were later transcribed, and preliminary data analysis was processed, in Chinese. Thematic analysis (Li, 2013) was subsequently employed to analyze the data. The following steps were followed. Firstly, the participant accounts from the two interviews were chronologically rearranged. This process generated 15 chronological narratives - one narrative for each participant. Secondly, the authors worked with a single chronological biographical narrative and used three tools—metaphors, literature and concepts related to cultural schemas— to identify analytical themes. Working with the narratives, the authors noticed that the participants often used metaphors to help them think about their lives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that metaphors are useful tools of narrative analysis. Metaphors (e.g., gambling 'prisoner') were identified to map out the analytical themes. Moreover, literature was utilized as a tool for developing themes. For example, minimal parental monitoring, fantasies triggered by Chinese gambling movies, and life transition difficulties were used as analytic themes. The authors then searched for concepts related to cultural schemas (e.g., filial piety), which were meaningful to the participants. Thirdly, particular accounts were selected to illustrate these themes and general patterns. As a result, the subheadings of the next section indicate the themes identified through this process.

This approach though is not without its weaknesses particular because of its highly subjective nature. However, to ensure the quality of the analysis, the following strategies were employed. Firstly, internal consistency was used as a core aspect of quality management of data analysis. Internal consistency was achieved by ensuring that what was said in one part of the narrative should not contradict what was said in another part. When inconsistencies were found in the narratives, the authors referred to the original digital recording to verify the inconsistencies and then discussed the inconsistencies with participants in the second interview or post-interview phone conversations. The two-interview structure also helped the authors with establishing the internal consistency of the findings as the authors could check that the narratives were consistent across the two separate interviews (Li, 2013). Secondly, the compellability or persuasiveness of the accounts was used to ensure that the narrative and interpretation seemed reasonable and convincing. Persuasion, according to Riessman (1993), is the greatest, when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from narrative accounts and when alternative interpretations of the narrative are considered. Throughout the processes of analysis, the authors kept asking

themselves whether the story was compelling, stimulating and insightful, and whether the interpretation was persuasive. If not, the authors considered alternative interpretations of the data.

Findings

The various forms of gambling

The participants indulged in a range of different gambling forms: Lotto, gaming machines in casinos and pubs, casino table games, and Mahjong. The female participants engaged more in games of luck (e.g., Lotto, casino gaming machines, money wheel and roulette). The male participants however preferred to play games that incorporated a skill-luck dimension, such as casino table games, with blackjack as their most popular choice. These male participants usually started with the money wheel and roulette, and later moved to blackjack and other table games when they felt they were more skilled and comfortable in the casino.

Factors motivating the CIS initial gambling

Researchers have posited many reasons why people initially decide to gamble. Some of these include, for example, seeking enjoyment and excitement; winning money; for the purpose of entertainment and having fun; socializing; or escaping from stress (Clarke, Tse, Abbort, Townsend, Kingi, & Manaia, 2007; Raylu & Oei, 2002). The participants however expressed the following factors that motivated their initial gambling: minimal parental monitoring; casino tours offered by their friends; satisfying their fantasies triggered by gambling movies; and life transitional difficulties. The nature and significance of these motives are explained in greater detail below.

Minimal parental monitoring

Most of the participants were from one-child families where their parents strictly monitored them. Studying was the main focus in their daily lives. However, starting a completely new life in New Zealand suddenly set these participants free from their parents' control and the nested environment they were used to. Xiao Lian (female, 23 years old), for example, described:

I felt that everything was fresh here in New Zealand and wanted to try everything that was new to me. I was like a young bird which had been set free from the cage and was now flying free in a wild world. Gambling in the casino was a completely new experience for me. I definitely wanted to try it. My parents were not around. I could go to the casino whenever I wanted to.

A cross-account analysis of the data indicated that all the participants presented a strong urge to take control of their new lives, which appealed to both their curiosity and interest in having different and novel experiences. The 'young bird' metaphor eloquently described this situation - the student used to live with her parents in a 'gilded cage' in China. However, these students were now being set free from such constraints even though their wings had not yet fully grown. Consistent with previous research (Thomas & Thomas, 2006), Xiao Lian's account suggests that minimal parental monitoring in some cases increased the risk of these CIS embarking upon a journey that led to problem gambling.

Casino tours offered by the participants' friends

In establishing their new social networks in New Zealand, many recently arrived CIS were welcomed by friends who were already in the country. According to the participants, a Chinese way of showing hospitality to the newly arrived students was to take them out for dinner, and to show them around town. The casino was a popular place on these sightseeing itineraries. Guo Wei (male, 29 years old) stated:

My friends, including some I knew in China and some I met in New Zealand, invited me to have dinner. After dinner, they took me to a casino on a sightseeing tour. I was very excited and learnt how to bet from them.

Guo Wei's account showed that peer influence remained a relevant factor in his initiation into gambling. Our data suggest that peers were very influential in encouraging the participants' gambling behavior, in this case through the organizing of the casino tour for Guo Wei. Such casino visits may be construed as acculturation tours, providing Guo Wei with his first contact

with New Zealand's gambling culture that was supposed to be a bit of harmless fun. For example, Yu Mei (female, 22 years old) observed that, "[t]he Kiwi held a glass of wine or a bottle of beer, chatting around and betting with small amounts of money. They did not care about winning or losing." This impression may lead these students to perceive gambling at casinos as an innocuous recreational pastime that they too could partake and enjoy as their Kiwi counterparts appeared to be doing. In other words, the participants' feelings towards gambling were rather positive. They tended to judge it as being a "low risk but a high reward" activity, which in turn motivated them to continue their gambling behavior.

Satisfying a fantasy and positive gambling expectancy triggered by gambling movies

Although there is little evidence to link youth gambling and exposure to gambling from movies, this may still be an area worth studying further. This is because research suggests that youths who are exposed to movies where the actors smoke are more likely to start smoking themselves (Sargent et al., 2005). Although youth smoking is a complex phenomenon informed by biological, social, economic and cultural factors, research suggests that movie stars who smoked both on and off screen might be encouraging young people to smoke as well (Distefan, Gilpin, Sargent, & Pierce, 1999). Consistent with this finding, Li Zhong's (male, 24 years old) account suggested that his initial gambling involvement was associated with such exposure to exciting gambling themes and scenes contained in movies:

> I really enjoyed gambling movies. I had dreamt that I would one day gamble like the leading actor in the Hong Kong movie *God of Gamblers*, wearing a smart suit, sitting at a table, betting huge amounts of money, and of course winning grand slams. I worked so hard - I gambled from 11am to 3am the next day. However, I did not win. Eventually, I lost about NZ$30,000 (approximately US$24,120).

Li Zhong's experience suggested that gambling movies triggered his attraction and curiosity towards gambling. Research has suggested that the male characterization of gamblers in Chinese movies may be a crystallization of public fantasies and desires (Chan & Ohtsuka, 2011). Our participants listed more than ten Chinese gambling movies that they had watched. According to

the *Chinese Movie Database* (2011), from 1989 to 2009, there were 30 Chinese gambling movies. The most popular one was *God of Gamblers*, a film that spawned five sequels, and was most frequently mentioned by the participants. These gambling movies are a part of popular Chinese culture that reflects the values and beliefs, likes and dislikes, and the norms and taboos of this community concerning gambling. In particular, these films highlight a popular perception that views gambling and gamblers in extremely positive terms, where the protagonists are portrayed as likable personalities who are skillful, intelligent and are capable of exercising supernatural power to surreptitiously change the cards that they have been dealt with in order to win. As Chan and Ohtsuka (2011) suggested, these 'gambling gods' are portrayed as righteous characters who strive mightily against the odds so that the wicked are punished. Not surprisingly, such 'gambling gods' are deeply admired by these CIS, who are emotionally, cognitively, and financially primed to emulate their 'heroes' in overt tests of skill and chance. Gambling at casinos offers them opportunities to live out these fantasies and to acquire tangible spoils from such endeavors, such as the respect of their peers and material wealth.

Life transitional difficulties

Initiation into gambling was also found to be associated with the challenges that these students faced in New Zealand. In the wake of experiencing the excitement of freedom from parental control, the participants also discovered other more difficult situations, including language barriers, loneliness, and frustration caused by being taught in a completely different educational system. Zhang Xin (male, 26 years old) stated:

> The first time I went to the casino was on my lonely birthday shortly after I moved from a city in the South Island to here. If I had friends who had suggested that I not go to the casino, I would not have then gone there, only to later lose my whole life. (sigh).

When Zhang Xin was studying English, he was surrounded by other Chinese students in the language institute, where the teachers there provided excellent support to all overseas students. This homely environment appeared to insulate him from gambling. He later moved to another city to further his academic studies. Unfortunately, for him, the support he received from the

new institute was limited as compared to the scaffolding he was offered by his previous English language teachers. This 'loss of social ties and the consequent suffering of loneliness' appears to be a common theme in the data collected from the participants. What is especially striking is that these sentiments were expressed to explain why some of them started gambling in the first place, and/or why they had continued to gamble thereafter. The prevalence of this common theme is consistent with previous research (Clarke et al., 2007; Loo, Raylu & Oei, 2008; Raylu & Oei, 2004) which suggested that loneliness and isolation were main motivations for gambling and that problem gambling was closely associated with life transitional issues.

Impact of excessive gambling on identity construction

Prolonged gambling hours resulting in a lack of intercultural interaction

By the time the participants were experiencing gambling problems, they had already spent a significant amount of time gambling on a regular basis. They generally gambled every day. The duration of their gambling sessions ranged from 5 to 16 hours per day or between 10 to 112 hours per week. Si Tu (male, 24 years old) provided an example:

> I went to the casino at about 8 in the morning, and left at about 8 in the evening. I stayed there almost 12 hours every single day.

This is significant because prolonged gambling appears to be an indicator of a shift from social gambling to problem gambling (Clarke, Tse, Abbort, Townsend, Kingi, & Manaia, 2006). The participants also reported that their gambling problems were somehow related to their deteriorating physical health with many losing weight, suffering from headaches, decreased appetite, insomnia, and increasing their consumption of cigarettes and alcohol. Apart from these physical health issues, problem gambling also impacted the participants' social wellbeing, and thereby potentially handicapping their ability to successfully adapt to their new cultural surroundings. According to the social model of health, social connectedness is an important indicator of wellbeing (Li, 2012). However, their prolonged gambling hours in casinos that were frequently populated by other mostly Chinese patrons inadvertently led to a lack of intercultural contact between the participants and the local New Zealanders. Li Zhong's (male, 24 years old)

excerpt illustrated that despite living in New Zealand, he nevertheless continued to live in a Chinese language environment with little intercultural exchange:

I didn't need to speak much English when I lived a gambling life. I made friends in the casino. We sometimes went out for dinner after the casino closed. I travelled with some gambling-mates during the holidays. Chinese was the language I used most of the time when I was a gambler.

The importance of establishing social connectedness with the local populace should not be discounted. This is because the adjustments to life in a new country can be especially difficult when people become socially isolated from the wider community. This is evident when Xiong Mei (female, 23 years old) reflected on her gambling life:

At some point, my [whole] life was spent in the casino, which was full of Chinese gamblers. I only had very limited contact with local students and local people. I felt that the casino was a "gambling prison" where I did not have contact with others except for gamblers.

The metaphor of a 'prison' symbolized that the participant was no longer a 'student' but had instead become a 'prisoner of gambling'. The place-based identity of a 'prisoner of gambling' indicated that gambling had severely limited Xiong Mei's time and ability to communicate with local residents, as well as restricted her participation in local social activities. Such self-imposed 'imprisonment' placed her at a disadvantage as this meant that she would not be able to avail herself a whole range of support networks that could have assisted in increasing her social wellbeing and cultural adaptation in New Zealand. Without developing social networks with local people, the participants were unable to establish a platform for cultural exchange and sharing and thus unable to produce positive sentiments for a place to which they would feel they belonged.

Academic failure resulting in shame and low self-esteem

Since gambling required a considerable amount of time and energy, it was not surprising that most of the participants reported that they had experienced academic difficulties. They cut classes or reduced their studying time in order to gamble. This eventually affected their academic performance. He Zhe's (male, 29 years old) account exemplified such a situation:

> I failed two papers in the first semester at university. I went to the casino every day. I thought about what numbers would come up on the Roulette wheels while I was listening to the lecturers. I saw the overhead projector screen as the screen of a gaming machine.

An Australian study suggested that CIS experienced greater academic stress than international students from other countries (Thomas, et al., 2011). This reflected the phenomenon that scholastic success in Chinese culture has been traditionally regarded a passport to social success and a means to enhance the reputation for the family within the community. In traditional Chinese society, scholars are highly respected, and Chinese parents dream of having an accomplished scholar in the family (Li, 2013). This is illustrated in a Chinese proverb, "All things are beneath contempt, except education". Due to these cultural schemas, great shame would have been inflicted on the participants and their respective families if they were unable to achieve their academic goals due to their substantial involvement in gambling. Consequently, the participants' hid their failures from their beloved ones, as Dai Jian (male, 41 years old) revealed:

> I planned to complete my MBA degree within three years. However, I failed because of my gambling. I was ashamed when I talked to my wife and daughter. I had to behave like a good husband and a good father on the phone. I didn't dare to tell my wife that I gambled and failed my studies.

Dai Jian's narrative appeared to suggest that poor academic performance destroyed his sense of worthiness and self-respect. Research has pointed out that the full development of human potential is enhanced through having a high self-esteem. Self-esteem is therefore one of the key ingredients that affect one's level of competency, including a successful adaptation to a new culture. In the interview, the tone of Dai Jian's voice was gloomy and despondent, and

accompanied by frowns, head shaking and sighing. The voice and body language suggested that Dai Jian was depressed, pessimistic about the future and self-defeated. Gambling problems caused him to feel out of control, guilty about his behavior, and stressed by the effect that gambling had on his life and on his family.

Inability to satisfy the parents' expectations resulting in being an unfilial child

According to Thombs (1999), addictive behavior, including problem gambling, is often a response to a 'fear of failure', which comes from being pressured to achieve excellent results by their parents, spouse, community, and so forth. As mentioned previously, the participants faced high achievement anxiety as most of them were the first batch of Chinese to reach adulthood since the implementation, in the 1980s, of the one-child policy in China. According to their interviews, they were extremely precious to their parents and grandparents. Letting go of their only child and entrusting them to the unknown was difficult for their parents, who often lived their own aspirations through their children. The parents expected that studying in New Zealand would be their children's ticket to a better career and life. He Zhe's (male, 29 years old) account provided one such illustration:

> My parents had implanted their dreams in my mind since I was a little boy. Studying overseas was their dream. They expected me to live their dream. They therefore sent me here to make their dream come true. Fulfilling my parents' wishes was my obligation as a filial child.

Filial piety, a Confucian concept, is considered to be the linchpin that holds together the parent-child relationship. Filial piety refers to the traditions of respect, reverence, care, obedience, and fulfilling one's duty to the parents and grandparents (Li, Hodgetts, Ho, & Stolte, 2010). According to Li (2011), Chinese parents consider that their children's achievements are manifestations of their filial piety. This reflects the Confucian ideology that a filial child should make the family name known and respected, so as to bring honor to the family. Zhang Xin's (male, 26 years old) excerpt below demonstrates that he felt he was an unfilial child because he had brought shame and dishonor to his family:

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When I told my parents that I had gambled and lost everything, they were heartbroken. My father called me an unfilial child because I "lost" my family's "face". My relatives and friends all blamed me for being an unfilial child.

In Chinese culture, filial piety is reflected by how others view the person (Li, 2013). Filial piety draws from, reflects upon, and responds to others. Zhang Xin's parents' reaction to his problem gambling suggested that their disappointment was informed not simply by their child's unfilial behavior, but to how they defined filial piety from the standpoint of others (e.g., the relatives and friends). The accusations heaped on Zhang Xin for being an unfilial child by his relatives and friends vicariously shamed his parents as well.

Discussion

This study attempted to uncover the primary reasons why the participants gambled in New Zealand. Factors such as minimal parental monitoring, casino tours offered by their friends, satisfying fantasies triggered by iconic gambling movies, and life transitional difficulties, all contributed to the initiation of their gambling. Once 'hooked', the participants began to invest more and more of their time and effort into gambling—almost to the exclusion of all other social and educational activities. These factors are consistent with the five-factor model of gambling expectancy that includes relational cost, social benefit, material gain, being out of control and money loss identified earlier (Chan & Tsang, 2012; Spurrier & Blaszczynski, 2013). The participants' gambling expectancies are initially formed through social influence and observational learning before they engaged in excessive gambling (Chan et al., 2013).

The exclusion of social and educational activities led to a lack of intercultural interaction between the participants and the local community, an unhealthy dependence on gambling, academic failure at university, dwindling finances, and the inability to fulfill their parents' expectations of bringing honor to their family name through scholastic performance. These deleterious consequences ultimately resulted in the participants being shamed by their significant others. This is in turn, induced remorse and guilt in the participants for failing to live up to their

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personal, as well as familial and Chinese cultural expectations. As a result, their sense of self-worth and self-respect became compromised. The participants thus readily accepted or assigned to themselves extremely negative self-images, for example, 'unfilial', 'unworthy', 'worthless', 'prisoner', 'a burden', 'hopeless' and so on, that dominated their whole sense of self. Such adverse labels only served to reduce their self-esteem even further. The casino then became a place where the participants' identities were actively defined and situated as 'problem gamblers'. In that regard, the participants' decision to initially gamble and thereafter to continue to gamble significantly impacts upon their identity construction within a new social and cultural context.

Our analysis suggested that the popularity of casino games among the participants was also indicative of their need to be in a place where there was an ethnic Chinese concentration. This reflects the findings of previous research which identifies language barriers and loneliness as being the most challenging issues that CIS are confronted with (Ho, Li, Cooper, & Holmes, 2007). For the participants, the casino represented a place to 'be'; to feel welcomed; and to overcome loneliness. In this sense, the casino becomes a shelter for the problem gamblers where they can escape from the acculturative stress that they experienced. By articulating a 'problem gambler' as being a place-based identity, this article offers a new window into gambling research which has, to some extent, ignored the place of gambling as an important component of a gambler's decision making process.

Although this study offers empirical data to analyze CIS' gambling decision making and its impact on identity construction in New Zealand, it is nevertheless a small qualitative study of a non-representative and self-selected group of problem gambling participants. This study, however, does raise a number of matters which can have more generalized or wider applications.

Firstly, this study found that skill-luck games (e.g., casino table games such as blackjack, roulette etc.) were the most popular gambling modes among the participants, both at the time when they were first introduced to gambling in New Zealand and when they continued to excessively gamble. This suggests that their continued involvement in gambling was somehow linked to the attractiveness that skill-luck types of games had on people. For example,

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individuals may show an optimistic overall expectancy about gambling outcomes and selectively discount the risk involved (Back, Lee & Stinchfield, 2011; Wong & Tsang, 2013), and to that extent contribute to the escalation of their problem gambling behavior. These results are consistent with previous research findings that gambling forms which involved an element of skill are attractive to 'serious gamblers' and hence linked to problem gambling. The most addictive forms of gambling involve enough skill to allow for a minor influence on the outcome, but not enough for it to be ultimately swayed in the gambler's favor (Clarke et al., 2006; also for a more recent review, see Spurrier & Blaszczynski, 2013). In this study, the participants' gambling strategy appeared to move from low-skill/high-luck games (e.g., money wheel and roulette) to the high-skill/low-luck ones (e.g., blackjack). This strategy indicates that skill plays an important role in motivating the participants' gambling behavior. For the participants, gambling forms that needed greater skills were perceived to be of lower risk possibly because of the assumption that they had greater control or a more positive expectation over the eventual outcome of the game. The relevant literature suggests that gamblers' expectations of potential outcomes are important to the maintenance or moderation of their level of gambling behaviors (Fortune & Goodie, 2011; Lee, Chae, Lee & Kim, 2007). According to Alhakamil and Slovic (1994), for many activities, the lower the perceived risk, the greater the perceived benefit. The participants thus tended to judge the risk of the high-skill/low-luck games to be low and its benefit to be high.

Secondly, this study further observed that casino table games appeared to be the most popular gambling form among the participants. One of the reasons for this popularity could be attributed to the influence of psychologically embedded cultural schemas within the participants' consciousness (Tse et al., 2012). Loo, Raylu and Oei (2008) argued that these cultural schemas can be transmitted generationally through the process of familial socialization, and hence impact upon Chinese gamblers' familiarity with, and preference for, certain forms of gambling. Affection and approval of, as well as familiarity with, certain gambling activities (e.g., card games) have been a part of Chinese culture for centuries (Li, 2007). These games are maintained within the culture by passing these values and beliefs about gambling from one generation to another. This familiarity may have attracted the participants to the casino tables in the first instance - creating a sense of déjà vu in the minds of the participants. Such an affective reaction

to table games is often the very first cognitive and/or emotional response, occurring automatically when the gambler enters the casino to gamble. This finding likewise suggests that pre-existing beliefs and experiences about gambling influence the participants' judgment and decision making processes.

Thirdly, the analysis showed that the participants felt that they had not been filial to their parents and hence brought shame and dishonor to their families. Such feelings reflect the Chinese cultural schema related to the concept of 'face'. In Chinese culture, the concept of 'face' does not refer to a person's physical face (Bond, 2010) but rather, the 'face' represents a person's social reputation and fame that have been deliberately accumulated by the person through efforts and achievements during the course of his/her life (Li, 2013). In order to achieve this kind of 'face', one must rely on the social environment to secure affirmation from other people. In this way, 'face' functions to maintain the gambler's identity that he/she wants others to accept. This finding suggests that the intervention designed to change problem gamblers' behaviors needs to take into account such cultural concepts so as to render them more culturally appropriate and hopefully, effective.

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