

Chinese Culture Information and Resources

It may help to familiarize yourself with some of the customs in China, before your arrival.

Useful Resources

Information about Chinese culture, language, and education is available online. Consider buying a Chinese travel guidebook. Guidebooks are a great source of general information on a variety of topics (sights, history, geography, population, government, and health) and usually contain a phrase book or a simple dictionary.

Eating

- Chinese hosts always say that there is not enough food or that it is not well-prepared. They are being humble; it is always nice to respond with appreciation and thanks. Dishes are generally served family-style, in the middle of the table for everyone to share. Serve yourself from main dishes using the spoon provided and then eat with chopsticks.
- When you are full, leave some food on your plate. If you finish everything, in China this is a sign that there wasn't enough food and the Chinese guests will immediately put more food on your plate, or encourage you to eat more. In traditional China culture the host is expected to put food on the plates of their guests as a sign of attention and care, although this tradition is changing and this practice is not as common nowadays.
- Do not leave chopsticks sticking up out of your bowl.
- Your cup of tea will constantly be topped up - when you don't want any more, leave it full.
- If you are offered a dish that you really do not want, you can politely refuse or accept a small amount and just take a taste. In general, try to keep an open mind and be respectful of the food offered to you.
- Do not be offended if a Chinese person makes slurping sounds; it merely indicates that they are enjoying their food.

Tipping

Tipping is welcomed in some situations in China, though it is not a tradition to tip in restaurants. In hotels, it is customary to give small tips (5-10 *yuan*, approximately 50 cents to \$1) to porters, cleaning staff, or others assisting you. You should, however, tip your tour guide and bus driver and will be advised on this in China.

Dress

- Revealing clothing is not appropriate for any occasions
- Comfortable, casual clothes are recommended for travel and sightseeing.

Gifts

Gifts are frequently exchanged in Chinese culture, especially in situations of hosting and visiting. Chinese hosts are traditionally very cordial and attentive to their guests; in most situations, they prepare small presents to give away. It is always nice to reciprocate.

There is no obligation to prepare gifts for the school leaders, educators, or students in the schools you'll visit. If you wish to do so, small objects, educational materials, or DVDs introducing your school and/or district are some ideas for suitable gifts. Please plan to carry any gifts yourself.

Chinese and Americans have somewhat different ideas and customs concerning gifts. There are a few important concepts to remember when choosing a gift for a Chinese person:

- Present gift with both hands, which is a symbol of respect.
- Odd numbers are less desirable than even numbers in Chinese culture. The exception to this rule is “four” which, although an even number, is considered unlucky because the pronunciation in Chinese sounds like “death”.
- Do not give a gift of a clock, which sounds like attending other’s funeral; pear, which sounds like “separation”. Do not present as gifts handkerchiefs, umbrellas, white, black or sharp objects. Chinese gift recipients do not usually open gifts in the presence of the giver... but sometimes the person presenting a gift, especially in a formal setting, will open the gift for the recipient, showing it to the assembled guests.

Other Etiquette

- Address people by their title and surname.
- Greet the higher-ranking person first
- In China it is traditional for a senior person in a group to serve as a spokesman for the introductory functions
- Handshakes are the most common way to greet foreigners in China
- Present business cards with both hands
- The guest of honor traditionally is seated facing the door
- Frowning while someone is speaking is interpreted as a sign of disagreement. Therefore, most Chinese maintain an impassive expression when speaking.

Key Concepts in Understanding Chinese Culture

(adapted from: http://www.culturalsavvy.com/chinese_culture.htm,
<http://www.china-nafsa.aief-usa.org/culture/chineseideas.htm>,
<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/others/china-culture-guide-part1.html#1>,
<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/china-country-profile.html>)

Confucianism:

Confucianism is a system of behaviors and ethics that stress the obligations of people towards one another based upon their relationship. The basic tenets are based upon five different relationships:

- Ruler and subject
- Husband and wife
- Parents and children
- Brothers and sisters
- Friend and friend

Confucianism stresses duty, sincerity, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority. Through maintaining harmonious relations as individuals, society itself becomes stable.

The Chinese generally are very careful with order, hierarchy, and harmonious interpersonal relationships. Americans are inclined to be open, direct, and even confrontational in ways that Chinese consider improper.

Face: To Americans it is more important to "be honest," "face facts," make their views known, and express their questions and disagreements. Chinese people, on the other hand, are very concerned with "face", which can be understood as "honor" or "good reputation", and the goal of much polite behavior in China is to maintain one's face or give face to other people. This includes paying proper respect to higher-ranking individuals and observing etiquette.

Indirectness: Chinese people are uncomfortable saying "no" directly, unlike Americans, because it helps the other person save face and preserves the harmony in the relationship. This unwillingness to say no can easily create communication problems, particularly with cultures at the opposite end of the bluntness-

tact scale, such as Americans and Germans. To function effectively in Chinese culture, it is necessary to become attuned to some of the most common verbal and non-verbal substitutes for "no", such as a pledge that one will "seriously consider" something, negative body language, or changing the subject. A related issue is the need to avoid a confrontational approach that brings conflicts into the open. Raising one's voice, losing one's temper, or making forceful physical gestures is almost always a bad idea in the Far East. Whatever the problem is, patience, firmness and cultural sensitivity will almost always work better than open confrontation.

Guanxi: Throughout much of Chinese history, the fundamental glue that has held society together is the concept of *guanxi*, relationships between people. Today this means who you know and what these people believe their obligations are to you.

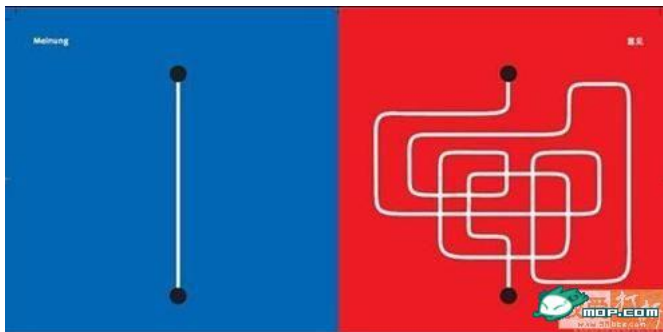
With a good network of contacts in China, almost anything can be accomplished. *Guanxi* is how things get done. The power of *guanxi* is one of the reasons given for why China does not have a reliable legal system.

Chinese Culture in Brief

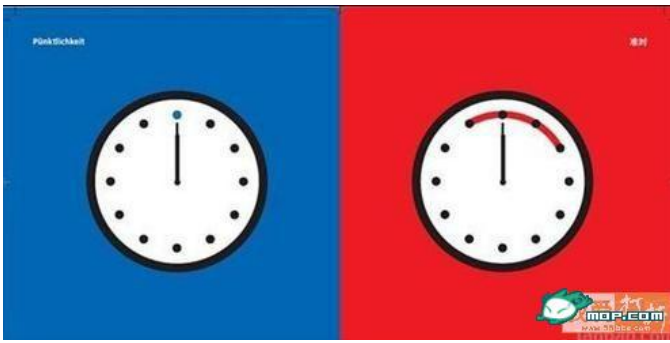
- Chinese culture is more collectivist than American culture and places a high value on group cooperation, harmony and individual modesty.
- Etiquette, hierarchy and formalities are closely observed and an important part of social relationships in China. When introducing yourself or others in a formal environment, use official titles, such as Dr. xx, Superintendent xx, or Mr. xxx.
- Relationships with other people are built on the basis of reciprocal obligations
- Very high importance is placed on the family and relationships with even distant relatives
- Chinese people live in close proximity to each other and the concept of personal space is different from that in American culture.

Cultural Differences (Americans on the left, Chinese on the right):

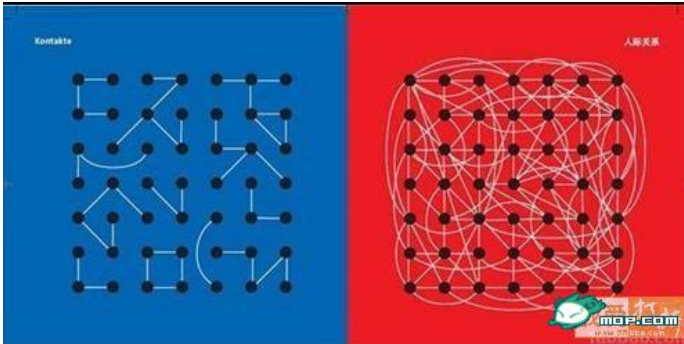
- How personal opinions are expressed



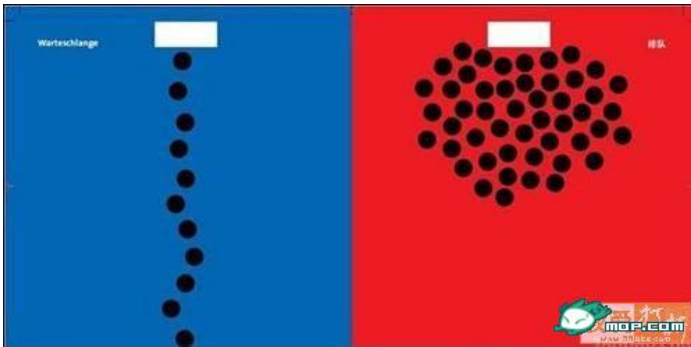
- Ideas about punctuality:



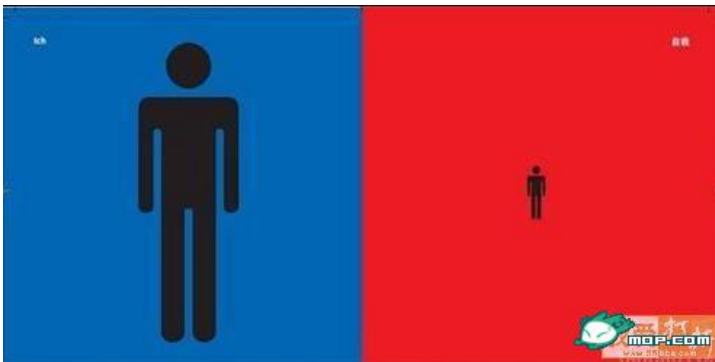
- Personal relationships:



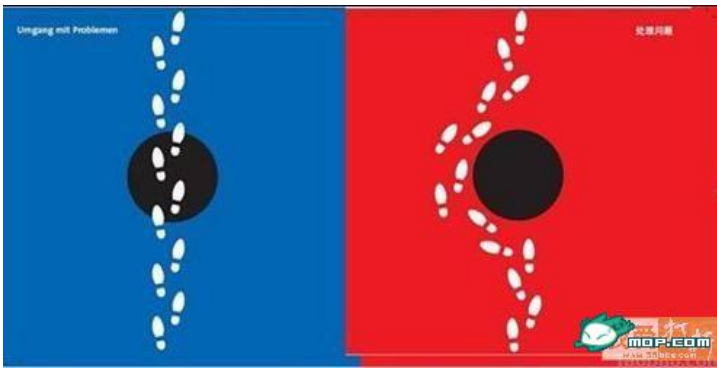
- Standing in line:



- Self-image:



- Resolving issues:



- The status of supervisors

