

Protocol And Other Useful Information

PATIENCE and TOLERANCE are VIRTUES
– and never more so than in China.

“When in Rome...” has never been so true than when applied to China (Zhong guo).

Chinese view foreigners (lao wai) in very much the same light as most Westerners bear Chinese. They may like what you have to offer; expertise, business acumen and knowledge, wealth and product awareness; however, they are not so fond of the manner in which it is often presented, nor the accompanying attitude (See, The men who would conquer China).

Even if you are General Motors, Microsoft or Sony, the way to succeed in China is to develop an understanding, adapt your strategies, and empathise with your Chinese associates.

Although Chinese business methodology appears ad hoc it should never be underestimated. They have their own unique style when doing business, which is not always understood by westerners.

To sit at the board table of a Chinese enterprise and tell them how we do it in the west (the only way, according to Hoyle) is little different to a Chinese businessman sitting at your board table, speaking only Chinese and demanding that all business be conducted the Chinese way – in YOUR COUNTRY!

Do not be pushy, arrogant, rude, overly anxious or show exasperation. Be patient and tolerant and all good things will come those who wait.

If your programme does not allow for flexibility in negotiations, perhaps it is best that you reconsider doing business in China. Go with the flow, roll with the punches, be like a willow in the wind, look, listen and learn – enjoy the challenge!

Chinese business relationships are based as much on personalities as they are business basics. The simple premise being that if you cannot relate to your partner how can you develop a relationship founded on mutual cooperation, trust and a singular objective.

Throw away the books, especially those written by academics, and at all times use your common sense, gut-feeling and business maturity.

The basics

Everybody makes mistakes, especially when you feel like a fish out of water.

However, to avoid making too many ensure you are accompanied by a competent and trusted interpreter at all times when conducting business; whether it be inspections, eating, informal discussions, sight seeing or ‘boots and all’ negotiations.

Welcome to China, welcome to the fastest growing economy in the world and welcome to the place where your business dreams can come true.

BUSINESS MEETINGS:

Be prepared !

- The people you will be meeting with will be government officials, company managers or expert employees. Most often they are very busy people. Please come prepared psychologically and physically, bring the hard copy and audiovisual material in Chinese and in sufficient quantity for proper dissemination.
- Chinese may not understand your spoken language, but your body language can be a dead giveaway. We suggest you buy and read Alan Pease’s book, Body Language, if you are not already familiar with its contents.
- Chinese must be accepted as being equal to the world’s best wheelers and dealers, negotiators and traders. They are raised in a culture that requires negotiation constantly and have subsequently been weaned onto bartering.
- Most meetings will be steeped with protocol. Please sit where you are directed to sit, it is important that you do so. Furthermore, it is important that you are not overly eager or impetuous to “get the ball rolling”. Be patient and look and listen, especially to your meeting manager.
- The Western practice of using a handkerchief to ‘blow one’s nose’ is considered disgusting and if the foreigner is stupid enough to offer his hand after such an event... Do not blow your nose when dining, especially when others are eating.
- If the Chinese at the meeting do not smoke, please do likewise.
- Business Cards (ming pian) are extremely important and should be bi-lingual (one side English/the other Chinese). Can you imagine how you would feel if a potential business partner handed you a card in an unintelligible language? There is also a strict protocol with exchanging business cards and what you then do with them.
- Remember that you will be working through an interpreter – do not interrupt and keep your dialogue as straight forward and precise as possible, bullet-pointed so to speak, do not use colloquialisms, idioms, jargon or other vernacular if you are trying to deliver a message. Be guided by your meeting manager and your interpreter at all times.

FOOD & DRINK:

- Western cutlery is often not available. If you cannot use chopsticks (kuaizi) you should bring your own cutlery (on standby). The Chinese will fuss over you and offer assistance if you are willing to try to learn their ways!
- Do not expect to be treated like a hero if you act like a 'Prima Donna'
- The Chinese use chopsticks and a porcelain spoon as their primary eating utensils.
- Something to consider: If you invited a Chinese person to your house for a baked dinner and he insisted on using chopsticks – how would you feel?
- To the Chinese, protocol and decorum are more important than table manners (which, often, are virtually no existent).
- Where you are seated is of great significance. Do not sit until directed to do so by your host.
- Chinese most often eat from common plates.
- Most of the people you will be dining with will be senior officials, and who will for the best part exhibit an extremely high level of hygiene, so please do not act as if the common plate is pig-swirl.
- When a dish is provided with common chopsticks use them to take the food to your plate and return them to the dish, same with spoons.
- Machine made, disposable chopsticks are the most often used (and preferred) in less expensive restaurants.
- Before use, rub them together as you would a carving knife and anvil to remove the minute splinters that maybe present or pay the penalty.
- Diet in Northern China is primarily wheat based. Wheat noodles, dumplings and steamed breads feature highly, including at breakfast.
- Tea (cha) is a standard side with lunch and dinner. Black tea is called European or Red Tea (hong cha). Coffee (kafei) must be asked for but is not often available. A form of drinking yoghurt and soy bean milk is served with breakfast.
- North Chinese dishes are very different from the Cantonese fare usually served in Western Restaurants.
- Almost everything is a must to try. Be adventurous.
- The people of North China eat from a small plate that is left on the table and generally changed at frequent intervals during the meal.
- Soup is served at the end of the meal in the small bowl provided.
- Beer, Pi Jiu is usually served at room temperature but cold (liang) or iced (bing) is readily available if asked for, as is White Rice Spirit, Bai Jiu.

Good imported wines and spirits are becoming more readily available and common, especially in better restaurants and hotels. Chinese grape and fortified wines are readily available.

IN PUBLIC:

- "Loudness" is not appreciated.
- Unconscious Playing with ones' genitals, or adjusting one's self is just not done
- Taxi's (there are 63,000 in Beijing) are metered (¥ 10 Flag-fall and ¥ 2.00 per kilometre) but will sometimes take foreigners (Lao Wai) by the scenic route.
- Be patient and tolerant, it is their country.
- Working class Chinese sometimes spit and clear their nostrils with great gusto on the ground and footpaths. Watch where you step.
- When visiting private homes it is customary that shoes are removed at the front door.

HOTELS (Da sha / Fen dian):

- Hot (Boiled), purified or mineral water is provided for your room.
- Boiled water is normally delivered in a large thermos type container and is considered safe to use without further treatment. If a doubting Thomas, please bring your own water purification tablets or buy bottled water, which is available everywhere.
- Local bottled water is available for about 30cents per litre.
- If using the hotel-supplied water, simply leave empty container outside room and it will be replenished, accompanied by a small knock on the door.
- Tipping is not a common practice in China, nor is it encouraged. Maybe a one or two RMB to the porter, but you should not tip in restaurants or taxis.

HEALTH:

- Do not drink the tap water – **ever!**
- Do not use tap water to clean your teeth or to wash your toothbrush
- Keep your mouth closed whilst under the shower

Ensure you have a Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Tetanus vaccinations and a get a Polio booster (if travelling to the countryside).

If you will be travelling to China regularly, Hepatitis B vaccinations are recommended.

Malaria prophylactics are recommended if you are spending time in known malaria areas, mainly southern China.

A small medicine kit is recommended,

- Maxalon (for Nausea)
- Paracetamol (for Headache and Pain)
- Medicated Throat Lozenges
- Antacid for indigestion

- Band-aids and eye drops are also recommended.

Otherwise the Chinese pharmacies can cater to most of your requirements, especially for stomach upsets. Please do not be paranoid about your health; China is a very safe country; health, hygiene and safety wise.

MONEY MATTERS:

The official currency of China is Yuan (CNY) ¥, known in China as Renminbi (RMB) 元 or people's money, often referred to as *Kuai*.

- Internationally traded currencies are easily negotiated in China, either at your hotel or banks and larger department stores and shopping centres.
- The People's Bank of China sets the exchange rate and is the same regardless of where you change your money, private moneychangers exempted.
- Passports are needed when changing money.
- Major international credit cards; Visa and MasterCard are universally accepted in hotels and larger restaurants.

Bum bags and other external 'tourist' bags are not needed and it is quite safe to carry your normal wallet or handbag; exercise usual precautions.

NAMES:

Chinese put their family name first, so that *Mr Deng Yong Hai* becomes *Mr Deng* or *Deng Yong Hai* to all his associates. His given names (Yong hai) are only ever used by his family and very close friends. As a matter of protocol you should *ALWAYS* address a business associate or acquaintance as Mr, Madame, Miss or by their full name, never by their given name. Of course they will do likewise with you; however, most often they will refer to you by your given name – in the belief that it is your family name.

SHOPPING:

- Most stores in the major cities are have fixed prices.
- When shopping at (tourist) markets, you must barter. Usually something just less than ½ the asking price is OK. Please do equate the local price with store prices at home and pay the asking price in areas where you are expected to barter. If you do not want to barter, don't shop at the markets!
- Check out the supermarkets, they can be a real eye-opener and are all fixed price.
- How much is it? (Dou xiao qian)

TELEPHONES (Dian hua):

Using the telephone in China can be expensive; especially calls placed through the hotels – up to

\$16.00 per minute to overseas, for example. GSM & CMDA mobiles work in China, analogue (North American Standard) cell-phones do not.

It is often desirable to have a China mobile number. You can readily buy local SIM cards.

Pre-paid IP and IC cards (available everywhere) are the most economical– although overseas calls can still cost up to \$1.25 per minute. Using IP Cards with local SIM card is cheaper than International Roaming.

TOILETS (WC):

Public Toilets are most often "footprints" and do not provide paper. A small personal pack of tissues is advisable.

Toilets are either very clean or very dirty, be prepared. However, in all fairness, most city toilets are very clean, albeit a bit odorous.

WOMEN (for men):

It is not good manners to be overly friendly with Chinese women and intent can be easily be misconstrued. Do not touch or thrust your hand out to a lady unless she offers hers' first and under no circumstances 'flirt', especially in public, as this can cause extreme embarrassment and will almost assuredly be the death nul of any transactions that you may be conducting if the woman happens to be personally associated with anyone accompanying you.

WOMEN (Niu ren) (for women):

Everything in the way of women's toiletries are available in cities. If you have special preferences it is suggested you bring your own. Make-up and other cosmetics are improving, and most foreign brands (genuine product) are available in major cities. Beware of fake copies.

Shopping for clothes can be fun if you are Size 12 or under, anything over can be a nightmare. Shopping for Children is a real treat.

For visiting women, it is best to adopt the Asian style of sitting; namely, upright with the knees together. Crossing of the legs and showing thigh will attract much attention or embarrassed eye diversions, either way you could be the loser. Showing the soles of ones feet is considered bad taste.

Overt displays vanity are common in China. Personal compliments are extremely well received

Notes and guidance provided by Geoffrey Weymouth, CEO, Global Access China Ltd.