

Core Concepts

- Modesty
- Filial piety
- Guanxi
- Interdependence
- Stoicism
- 'Face'
- Unity

China is the most populous country in the world and has the second largest land area. Its cultural influence is felt throughout the Asian region and has impacted the world on a large scale through the arts, sciences, cuisine, production and trade. Chinese culture has undergone a rapid and intense transformation over the past 50 years and continues to adapt to the modern world. Due to the country's massive size and long, complex history, it is difficult to summarise the society without running the risk of oversimplifying the culture. The immense geographic and demographic size of the nation accommodates many different ethnic groups that each have distinctive dialects, customs and traditions. It is important to recognise this diversity, as the West has a tendency to perceive the Chinese as a homogeneous people.

China's Seclusion

For two millennia, the Chinese empire was one of the most advanced and innovative civilisations in the world. The dynasties had incredible cultural and military success, conquering and absorbing neighbouring societies into their own. An ethnocentric understanding of the world came to resonate with the Chinese, as their experience with foreigners was generally limited to confrontations with those who tried to invade them or those that they overpowered and assimilated into their empire. Given this, when European traders arrived in the 1500s, the population initially struggled to comprehend how they fit into a wider, modern nation-state system. The Chinese had considered themselves the epicentre of the world for centuries, so the dynasty initially showed no real interest in getting involved in global politics.

The empire eventually collapsed and became reimagined as a nation-state. However, the Chinese sense of cultural superiority led the country to isolate itself further. As the Western and Eastern worlds advanced trade and began to globalise, China continued to be a secluded and conservative country into the 20th century. Diversions from traditional conventions were strongly resisted. From the late 1940s onward, the sovereign government rejected globalisation, enforced national unification through a stringent communist regime. This regime was known to deny the traditional values of Chinese culture and embrace a new set of values and beliefs. Life was largely contained to the country's borders with a closed economy (until 1978) and closed borders (until 1974). In 1978, the nation acknowledged the need for international involvement and began to embrace modernisation and globalisation. The Chinese Economic Reform heralded a new era of Chinese openness. Attention shifted to focus on prosperity, science and culture, with the Communist Party's control on individuals' liberties loosening.

Society Today

In light of China's history and recent fundamental change, one must appreciate that the people have been receptive or "open" to the outside world for only the past 40 years. Since this radical transformation, cities have commercialised and corporatised. The Chinese people now enjoy the freedom to travel, get an overseas education and learn other languages. Though behaviour remains tightly regulated and the culture still echoes the country's feudal past, China has become more internationally exposed. Contemporary Chinese culture is heavily influenced by a unique combination of its embedded traditions and this recent, rapid modernisation.

Today, a clear divide in social attitudes is visible in the different mindsets between the young and old, as well as urban and rural dwellers. The older generation and rural Chinese tend to value traditional culture and try to preserve and uphold it. On the other hand, Chinese youths and city dwellers tend to be more accepting and enthusiastic about progressive ideals. There are also different opinions throughout the population regarding the importance of cultural preservation and modernisation.

Nevertheless, the country maintains a fundamental understanding of what it means to be Chinese. The Chinese cultural identity has been developed through centuries of shared history and customs (such as Confucianism, 'filial piety', '*guanxi*' and the government's involvement in individuals' lives). As such, the current mindset of the Chinese people is a combination of their modern aspirations and traditional origins. The emerging Chinese culture is being defined by its innovation, preservation and recent cultural and economic evolutions.

Ethnic and Language Composition

The Chinese government officially recognises 56 ethnic groups within the country, with the vast majority identified as ethnically Han Chinese (91.6%). This ethnic group outnumbers the minority ethnic groups in every province and autonomous region, except for Tibet and Xinjiang. For this reason, the dominant culture, traditions and written language in China are that of the Han. Where minority ethnic groups are found in large numbers, the areas are often classified as autonomous regions (e.g. Tibet). In some areas of China (such as the southwest), many ethnic groups reside within the same geographic region. They may live in isolation from one another, as each has generally maintained their own distinct cultural traits and language. Some also have different economic structures.

As China's ethnic landscape is largely homogeneous, the population's diversity is generally understood on a linguistic basis. There are several language families represented in the country. The Sino-Tibetan family is by far the most salient. Within this language family, Han Chinese is the most widely spoken. However, the Han speak several mutually unintelligible dialects largely distinguished by regional differences. By far the most known is 'Mandarin,' also known as '*putonghua*,' which means 'ordinary language.' There are three variations of Mandarin depending on the region. The '*Beijing Hua*' ('Beijing dialect') is the most widespread and has been adopted as the national language. It is taught in schools, thus nearly all Chinese can speak, read and write Mandarin.

Written Chinese uses characters to express words, ideas or principles. While there are nearly 50,000 characters, only about 8,000 are in regular use. While people in different regions may struggle to understand each other's spoken language, most use the same basic set of characters and can communicate in writing.

Confucianism

Confucianism is a guiding philosophy in China that emphasises the importance of healthy human interactions. It promotes the idea that relationships between people are unequal and that everyone should have defined hierarchical roles (for example, ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son). It teaches that when this natural inequality is accepted and respected, it becomes easier to maintain harmonious, stable relations between individuals and, therefore, in society as a whole. The Confucian logic of obedience, responsibility and adherence affects many aspects of Chinese behaviour and attitudes about virtue. The Chinese sense of duty and societal cohesiveness is encapsulated in the principle of 'Li' ('social cohesiveness').

One may notice that within Chinese society, interactions are tiered and require a level of deference and respect from one party. Within the social hierarchy, a person's position, occupation and level of education are essential to their status. However, age is often an overriding factor that determines the level of respect people should show. The importance of age is emphasised in Confucianism as 'filial piety.' This is the core concept that requires one to give parents and elders utmost respect and devotion. Filial piety is akin to the reverence of one's ancestors and may entail unconditional obedience of seniors.

It is important to note that traditions and Confucian values are losing popularity in China. They still influence the way society functions; thousands of years of traditional education has deeply embedded Confucian concepts such as modesty, obedience, loyalty and filial piety into society. However, the more traditional tenets of Confucius's teachings (such as sexist ideologies and rural land tenure) are increasingly viewed as relics of China's feudal past. In fact, various aspects of Chinese culture have significantly evolved in the past few decades.

Unity and Interpersonal Interactions

China has one of the most collectivist cultures in the world. However, economic growth and increased financial independence is giving rise to more individualistic attitudes. People are encouraged to share the same mentality or goals as their family, workplace and government. In return for demonstrating loyalty and commitment to duty, an individual gains a sense of protection and unity. As such, the social organisation of China is characterised by people's interdependence. Individuals are taught to keep to themselves and respect the law and authority to maintain societal harmony. The Chinese consider national unity and cooperation to be essential for society to function harmoniously. This is reflected in the most fundamental foundations of the culture. For example, all regions in China follow the same time zone despite the physical landmass spanning five geographical time zones. This provides for a national sense of belonging and equality.

The cultural emphasis on unity and harmony also means that the Chinese have a strong relational focus. Interpersonal interactions are approached sensitively, with an acute consideration of people's feelings. All behaviour and communication in China are influenced by the concept of 'face'. Face is the quality, embedded in most Asian cultures, representing a person's reputation, influence, dignity and honour. Individuals usually act deliberately and with restraint to protect their self-worth and peer perception. Conservative conduct is the norm, as people don't want to stand out and/or risk losing face by doing something that is considered inappropriate. Face is so intrinsic to Chinese culture that the government

and business entities incorporate it into their decision-making processes. For example, a company may buy expensive equipment that is never used to improve their face'.

Guanxi

Another important concept in interpersonal interactions is that of *'guanxi'*. The word *'guanxi'* is a general term used to describe relationships that may also result in the exchange of connections or favours that benefit both people. The principle of *guanxi* commits friends, family and, at times, business colleagues to assist one another. Violating *guanxi* can lead to a loss of face or honour. *Guanxi* plays a large role in business interactions and relations. *Guanxi* often refers to *'networking'*, which is reflected in the Chinese saying, *"nei wai you bie"* ("insiders are different from outsiders"). Good *guanxi* can sometimes be necessary to creating opportunities that otherwise would not be accessible. Mutual trust is essential to *guanxi*. In turn, many Chinese will prioritise relationship building, particularly in a business context.

Politeness and Courtesy

Perceptions of politeness and courtesy (*'limao'*) in China differ from those in Australia. Traditional Chinese courtesy rests on the lifelong hierarchical relationships reflected in Confucian ideology. These relationships are already clear, meaning that the Chinese do not feel the need for constant verbal reinforcement through courtesy words like *'please,' 'thank you'* and *'excuse me'*. Many Chinese feel that saying such terms in the company of elders, relatives or close friends creates formality and distance that should not exist. Moreover, some can feel that the repeated use of courtesy words in a habitual way can come across as lacking sincerity.

This tradition continues today whereby the Chinese way to show politeness and kindness is to shorten the social distance between one another. Thus, courtesy words act as a buffer or space that indicates formality and distance. From a Western perspective, the contrast between the politeness of what one does and the bluntness of what one says can seem confusing. For example, when at a restaurant among friends, a Chinese person will usually pour tea for everyone present at the table before pouring their own. Yet, they may not say *'excuse me'* when asking for someone to pass them food. In this way, a cultural difference in manners can sometimes be perceived as rude. However, be aware that respect and courtesy are simply exhibited in different ways.

Population Density and Public Spaces

With a huge population, China has a high population density (especially in its cities) and the space of the average piece of housing is smaller than what is the norm for families in Australia. Therefore, many Chinese favour using public spaces, such as parks, to undertake their personal activities. As crowding is normal and expected, people are generally less protective of the personal space and privacy of themselves and others. The Chinese generally have quite loud public demeanours. People may openly express their emotions, carry out their conversations within earshot of others, sing or even dance with indifference for those around them. Not only is this considered normal behaviour, it generally does not inconvenience the broad Chinese public.

This cultural difference in public manners sometimes leads foreigners to interpret Chinese as being rude or disrespectful. In the English-speaking West, public spaces are generally places where their solitude, privacy and personal space is respected. For example, it is common courtesy to lower the volume of one's voice to avoid disturb those in your vicinity when on public transport, in a park, a library or a cafe. Nevertheless, this is not always the expectation in China. Public spaces are anticipated to be '*renao*' (bustling with noise and excitement) as various people carry out their own activities. People may practice Tai Chi, calligraphy, or even do ballroom dance classes. It is common for other members of the public to join in the activity or stop to watch.

Greetings

- Handshakes are the standard, casual greeting. The grip tends to be lighter than the Western handshake and is also sustained for longer.
- In formal situations, people bow slightly or nod politely to greet one another formally. The bow is from the shoulders and should be greater if the person you are greeting has a higher status than you.
- If seated, the Chinese will stand up out of respect when they are introduced to someone.
- Always greet those that are older than you first.
- Use a person's family name and appropriate title to address them unless they have indicated that you can move on to addressing them on a first-name basis.
- Usually, only friends address one another by their given names.
- Nicknames are used only between very close friends or lovers.
- To show a high level of respect, friends might use the terms '*lao*' (old) and '*xiao*' (young) with or instead of titles.
- When first meeting a Chinese person in a rural area, it is common to be invited to join them for a meal. This is an old greeting that offers politeness, yet does not usually transpire into an actual meal.
- It is considered impolite to greet a friend with a comment that could be perceived to have negative connotations, such as "You look tired".

Religion

According to the CIA World Factbook (2010), just over half of the Chinese population is unaffiliated with a religion (52.2%). It should be noted that traditional Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism are not always considered to be religions by Chinese people. They are more commonly perceived as a way of viewing life that can coexist with other religions – such as Buddhism. Most Chinese people (including those who identify as non-religious) have some affiliation with or understanding of traditional Chinese philosophies, as the tenets and values of these belief systems still tend to have a strong influence on social behaviours and practices.

With that being said, 21.9% identify with a folk religion, 18.2% identify as Buddhist, 5.1% identify as Christian and 1.8% identify as Muslim. Of the remaining population, 0.7% identify with some other tradition, less than 0.1% identify as Hindu and less than 0.1% identify as Jewish.

Religion in China

The political and social upheavals during the first half of the 20th century in China had a disintegrating effect on Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (excluding Tibet). From the late 1940s onwards, the country has been officially atheist but allows those who are religious to practise their faith within certain guidelines. Today, many Taoists, Buddhists, Muslims and Christians practise their faith in China. Indeed, there are various temples, mosques and churches open to the public. Religious groups are able to hold meetings, produce materials and worship; however, their activities are monitored. Breach of government guidelines can result in imprisonment or further restrictions on the practice of their faith. Foreigners can be charged under the law for distributing religious books and flyers when travelling in China.

Some religions have been persecuted, the most notable being Tibetan Buddhism. The Chinese government continues to curtail those considered to be threats to the social and political order (such as the new religious movement known as Falun Gong). Unauthorised religious activities can lead to imprisonment and other restrictions. Nonetheless, the Chinese government has gradually relaxed many of its previous restrictions on religious practices and institutions.

Confucianism in China

Confucianism – a body of traditional practices rather than a religion – plays a significant role in the personal beliefs of many Chinese. The foundations of Confucianism are derived from the teachings of Confucius, who emphasised the importance of healthy relationships. It promotes the idea that relationships between people are unequal and that everyone has defined hierarchical roles (for example, ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son). When this natural inequality is accepted and respected, it becomes easier to maintain harmonious, stable relations between individuals and, therefore, in society as a whole. These core values are reflected in respect and a sense of duty towards others, as well as maintaining loyalty and honour for oneself and their family. A major part of daily life for Chinese is ancestor veneration, as well as respecting their elders (filial piety). Although modernisation has posed challenges to the tradition, Chinese are finding ways to reconcile and uphold Confucian values.

Taoism in China

Taoism, also referred to as 'Daoism,' is rooted in the philosophical teachings of Laozi, a great thinker from China in the 6th century BCE. The tradition is based on the perception that the universe is a reality in which everything that exists is connected; the main emphasis is placed on a deep connection with nature and self-development. While difficult to accurately convey in English, the central tenet of Taoism is that of '*Tao*' ('the Way'). The essence of Tao is 'the One,' namely the notion of unification and harmony. A tenet of Taoism perhaps most familiar to Westerners is the concept of Yin and Yang. This explains the world as full of opposites working in harmony, unified in how they complement one another (e.g., light and dark, high and low, etc.). Taoist beliefs relate to seeking harmony with nature, spiritual immortality, Tai Chi and the cultivation of 'virtues' manifest through practices of meditation and in '*feng shui*'.

Mahayana Buddhism in China

The religious and philosophical tradition of Buddhism originates in the teachings of the Buddha. The core Buddhist teaching is the doctrine known as the 'Four Noble Truths,' which states that it is through

practising the 'Noble Eightfold Path' that one may be liberated from the perpetual suffering that underpins all existence. The most popular variant of Buddhism in China is Mahāyāna Buddhism, which somewhat differs from the earliest known formulation originating in India (known as Theravāda Buddhism). Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasises the '*Bodhisattva*' ideal of seeking full awakening through attaining perfection in morality and knowledge while endeavouring to assist others on their path towards enlightenment.

In China, there are two main types of Mahāyāna Buddhism: '*Ch'an*' (also known as '*Zen*' in Japanese) and 'Pure Land'. The Ch'an tradition emphasises the role of meditation in the midst of our day-to-day lives as a way to reaching liberation. The Pure Land tradition provides an alternative for those who struggle with meditation. In this tradition, the emphasis is on chanting and concentration.

Vajrayana Buddhism in China

Another form of Buddhism practised in China is known as Vajrayāna Buddhism. Because of its association with Tibet, it is often referred to as 'Tibetan Buddhism'. Within Tibetan Buddhism, teachers (also known as a 'Lama') are given high status. Well known to the West is the 14th Dalai Lama, Lhamo Dondrub, who is considered to be the spiritual leader of Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism also emphasises a variety of practices such as those relating to the tantric tradition and mantras (a repeated word, sound or phrase to assist concentration).

Tibetan Buddhism has often been used as a vehicle to promote Tibetan ethnic identity. Indeed, Buddhism has played a central role in the ongoing troubles between China and Tibet. In summary, China has long-held claims over Tibet. Before China's claim to Tibet, the region was a theocracy whereby the Dalai Lama was the head of state. In the late 1950s, massive uprisings occurred in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. During this time, the Dalai Lama and most of his ministers fled to northern India, followed by another 80,000 Tibetans. In the mid-1960s, China declared Tibet to be an autonomous region of China. Thus, Tibet was subject to the Cultural Revolution, whereby many temples and monasteries were destroyed.

Many Tibetan monasteries have been rebuilt since the 1960s by Tibetan exiles in the Indian subcontinent and beyond, and since the 1980s by Tibetans in China. A more recent development is the proliferation of Tibetan ritual symbols in foreign environments, such as the use of mandalas. In Tibet itself, many are cautiously reviving Buddhism and enhancing the Tibetan identity while also co-operating with Chinese authorities. Protests have been ongoing throughout Tibet since the late 2000s over its autonomy and religious freedom.

Family

The family unit is considered to be one of the most central institutions. For many, their family provides them with a sense of identity and a strong network of support. In China, the family is largely understood through Confucian thought. In Confucian thinking, the family contains the most important relationships for individuals and forms the foundations of all social organisation. For instance, the roles of husband and wife, parent and child, elder brother and younger brother are clearly defined. A husband/father is expected to exhibit dominance and kindness to his wife in return for obedience and love, and offer guidance and protection to his children in return for respect and obedience.

Confucian roles are not strictly adhered to anymore. Nevertheless, children are still expected to obey their parents and honour their elders. This is in accordance with *filial piety*, the Confucian tenet that stresses the importance of age. For example, in most regions of China, the entire family is expected to consult family elders on big decisions. Moreover, children are expected to care for their parents as they age. Sending elderly parents to an aged care facility is considered shameful.

Families are also perceived to have a collective identity and reputation in China. This is often referred to as face, whereby the act of a single individual will impact the perception of all its members by others. The interest of the family is expected to supersede the interests of the individual. Family members are also expected to receive preferential treatment in return for their loyalty to the family.

Financial Success

The average Chinese household dynamic has evolved away from the traditional archetype as the country has modernised and advanced technologically. Financial success is now a key status symbol. The implementation of the Chinese government's one-child policy meant that for years the family's prospects rested largely on the shoulders of their only child. While the policy was phased out in 2015 and parents can now have more than one child, most are still utterly devoted to their children's success. They ultimately want to see their children be more prosperous than themselves. Therefore, receiving a good education and attending university is highly regarded. However, this is often expressed in a way that puts heavy expectations on the child to excel in meeting their parents' aspirations.

Today, some Chinese believe that love is shown through the provision of money to one's family members. Less focus is being put on personal bonding as parents work harder and for longer to earn more money. More mothers are becoming full-time workers, and fathers are often absent due to work-related commitments. It is common for young children to be raised by their grandparents while their parents work away from home. As such, quality family time is scarce. Chinese families also often aim to build or buy a house, as home ownership represents a higher status. These goals entail saving for many years, making thrift and careful money management top priorities for the average Chinese family.

Gender Roles

Within the traditional household hierarchy, the patriarch and family provider was the father or eldest son. He was upheld as the ultimate decision-maker, though some families may have deferred to consulting their elders. Traditionally, the mother's role was to fulfil domestic duties and care for the children. Extended family also commonly lived with the immediate family. Nowadays, this household model is common only in very rural areas.

As gender equality has been embraced, women are now able to work and exercise authority in family matters. In some metropolitan areas, like Shanghai, women can be more dominant than men in the household. Moreover, many women residing in large cities will work to lower the financial burden on their husband. Nevertheless, there is still a gender gap in politics and business. Women are also often expected to care for the children and household. Some of the cultures in China live according to a matriarchal family structure, with women being the head of the household and the primary decision maker.

Marriage and Dating

Couples will often meet each other through mutual friends or social gatherings. However, online dating and matchmaking are becoming more popular. Intimate relations and public displays of affection are discouraged throughout the country but are becoming more common in cities. According to a general health report, the percentage of the population engaging in premarital intercourse has increased from 40% in 1994 to 71.4% in 2012. More than half of the younger Chinese population no longer consider virginity at marriage a serious matter. However, there is a generational divide around this value. Intimate relations engaged in for the sake of pleasure are still discouraged or forbidden by many educational institutions and parents. Virginity is still sometimes a prerequisite for a Chinese marriage, and a bride's husband and family may ask for proof of it.

Most Chinese expect to be married, largely because family is considered the most important facet of one's life. Marriage is often seen as a step towards reaching adulthood. Socioeconomic status is an important consideration for many Chinese when choosing a spouse. The permitted age for marriage in China is 22 for men and 20 for women. The Chinese government encourages people to marry later in life to reduce population growth and those who marry before the sanctioned ages are not entitled to the same benefits. It is also becoming more popular for young people to cohabit before marriage; many will hide it from their more traditional parents. When a couple decides to marry, they first sign a legal contract at a local government office without ceremony. Afterwards, there is a large reception with both the groom and bride's family and friends. There may be more ceremonies depending on the family and their traditions.

Naming

- In Chinese names, the surname comes before one or two given names, the format being [surname] [given name] [given name]. The surname is usually one syllable, and the given names may contain one or two syllables each.
- In China, people address each other by their full name. When they wish to denote respect, they use one's surname and appropriate title. It is disrespectful and uncommon to address someone by their given name alone.
- Only close friends and relatives may address each other by their nicknames.
- People may refer to those older or younger than them as 'old' [surname] (e.g. *Lao WANG*) or 'young' [surname] (e.g. *Xiao WANG*) to show respect and affection.
- Chinese women do not change their names when they marry, but children are given their father's name. However, during the one-child policy, some children were given their mother's surname or the surnames of both parents.
- Chinese names are hard for Westerners to pronounce as the tones of Cantonese and Mandarin are very specific. Upon moving to Australia, the Chinese consider this (along with the pressure to conform to Western standards), and therefore, most will adopt a Westernised first name. They may keep one of their original first names as a middle name, but essentially adopt a new name and format it in the Western way: [Westernised first name] [Chinese first name/middle name] [surname]. This new name is only used in Western and international contexts; they revert to their original name when returning to China. However, first-generation Chinese migrants living in Australia usually give their Australia-born child a Western name instead of a Chinese one.
- 270 million Chinese have one of the following three most popular surnames: *Li*, *Wang* and *Zhang*.

Etiquette

Basic Etiquette

- Give and receive everything with two hands.
- Tipping is considered derogatory as it is something a superior does to an inferior.
- The correct decorum during interactions in China always entails showing deference to those who are older. It is expected that one bows their head slightly and speaks softly when conversing with someone elderly. The advice or opinion of the elderly should never be contested. Talking back to or refuting them is considered very rude.
- The Chinese are often punctual and will generally arrive at the designated time, particularly when meeting someone for the first time. For casual appointments or gatherings with friends or family, Chinese people tend to attach less importance to punctuality.

Visiting

- Invitations are usually used in formal settings. In other instances, people will arrive unannounced.
- When invited to someone's home, Chinese are generally punctual.
- Guests are expected to exercise restraint and refrain from loud, boisterous actions and speech.
- Friends will often bring gifts like tea, cigarettes, fruit, chocolates or cake when visiting to show their '*xin yi*' ('blessings' or 'good intentions') towards the host.
- Hosts usually offer refreshments like fruit or nuts. If guests decline the offer, hosts will typically insist several times before accepting the refusal.
- Etiquette at dining tables shows deference to the social hierarchy of age.

Eating

- Food is often placed at the center of the table, and there are usually multiple dishes to be eaten with rice.
- Place the foods that mix with rice in your rice bowl, and hold the bowl close to your mouth as you feed yourself.
- Try and taste everything served as this is considered polite when eating as a guest in someone's home.
- Eating a lot of rice without complementary component foods indicates that you do not like the meal.
- Do not eat the last of anything left on a serving tray.
- If you want a second serving, refuse the host's offer once before accepting it.
- Leave a small amount of food on your plate when you have finished eating. An empty plate indicates that the host did not provide enough food and that you need your plate to be filled again.
- Place any bones or seeds on the table beside your plate or in a provided dish. Do not put them back in your rice bowl.
- Do not leave chopsticks in the rice bowl after using them. Place them on the table.
- Avoid sticking your chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice. This is seen to resemble the incense used during funerals and thus implies death.

Gifts

- Pass a gift to the recipient with both hands.

- A Chinese person may decline receiving a gift two or three times out of politeness before accepting.
- Gifts are not opened immediately or in the presence of the gift-giver.
- Careful attention is paid to the wrapping of a gift, as the first impression it gives is very important. The more elaborate the wrapping, the better. Gifts wrapped in red and gold paper denote luck, whereas white, blue or black wrapping has sour connotations.
- Do not give expensive gifts that are difficult to reciprocate or match. Such gifts will cause the Chinese recipient to lose face, resulting in a possible rejection of the gift.
- Sweets, fruits, flowers (excluding white ones) or spirits make for good gifts.
- Do not give gifts that add up to four in number. The pronunciation of the word 'four' sounds similar to the Chinese word for 'death'.
- Taboo items for gifts: sharp objects (e.g., knives, scissors), clocks, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, green hats, mirrors, and yellow or white flowers. See 'Other Considerations' for more taboo items that are inappropriate as gifts.

Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Express flattery where it is due. This will give face to the recipient; however, always do so with sincerity or they may lose face instead.
- Receive compliments humbly, with responses such as "Not at all" or "It was nothing".
- Make an effort to keep discussion harmonious and balanced.
- Be patient during discussion, as Chinese people tend to take more time to communicate their point. They often allude to their meaning instead of getting straight to the point. Rushing them or being impatient will likely make it uncomfortable for them to communicate with you.
- When given a vague response to a question of yours, ask it in several ways to ensure that you've understood them correctly.
- Show proper respect to those older than you (see *Etiquette* for details).

Don'ts

- Avoid boasting by mentioning your qualifications or impressive achievements.
- Do not provoke discussion about the political status of Taiwan or Tibet. Relations with both regions are tense and (while a person's position on these issues cannot be presumed) any suggestion that these areas do not belong to China may potentially offend your Chinese counterpart.
- Try to abstain from interrupting or 'filling the silence' during conversation.
- Avoid directly criticising someone, pointing out their mistakes or giving insincere compliments. These are all actions that cause Chinese people to lose face.
- Do not draw on similarities between China and Japan, as these East Asian countries have distinctly different societies and cultures. Many Chinese find blanket, uninformed comparisons to be insulting or ignorant.
- While it depends greatly on the relationship you have with your Chinese counterpart, it is best never to criticise China too heavily. Some people may openly criticise their country's social or environmental problems; however, it is a good idea to temper your own negative opinions by expressing admiration of China's legacy. Most Chinese are very proud of their country's long history of achievements and would be offended by sharp criticism of it.

Communication

Verbal

- **Indirect Communication:** As an extension of the need to maintain harmonious relations, the Chinese rely heavily on indirect communication. They rely less on words and are more attentive to posture, expression and tone of voice to draw meaning. Their speech is often ambiguous, and they may understate their point. The purpose of this is to maintain harmony throughout the conversation and prevent a loss of face on either end of the exchange. The best way of navigating this rhetoric and finding the underlying meaning is to check for clarification several times.
- **Refusals:** A Chinese person's preoccupation with saving face and politeness means they will seldom give a direct 'no' or negative response, even when they do not agree with you. Therefore, focus on hints of hesitation. Listen closely to what they say, but also pay careful attention to what they don't say and double-check your understanding.
- **Laughter:** When relaying bad news, a Chinese person may smile and laugh to diffuse the uncomfortable situation.
- **Voice:** In China, men generally speak louder than women. When a woman talks loudly, she may be considered to have bad manners.
- **Language:** Standard Chinese (known as '*putonghua*' or Mandarin) is based on the Beijing dialect and is the official national language. Most people can read, write and speak Mandarin as it is taught in schools. Chinese is a tonal language, meaning that a single word may have multiple meanings depending on how it is pronounced. For example, the word '*ma*' can mean "scold", "linen", "horse", or "mother" depending on the tone used by the speaker. Many people will also use the language or dialect of their geographic region.

Non-Verbal

- **Personal Space:** The Chinese tend to be comfortable standing just over an arm's length from one another. When meeting strangers, this distance will be farther.
- **Physical Contact:** The Chinese generally do not touch people that are strangers to them unless it is unavoidable (i.e., in a crowd). However, close friends or the same gender may stand or sit close to one another or walk arm in arm. They will avoid touching during conversation unless it is to a family member, close friend or a partner.
- **Eye Contact:** Direct eye contact is generally favoured over indirect eye contact. It is considered a sign of politeness. When conversing with an unfamiliar elder, one may lower their head to lower their gaze. This is a sign of respect.
- **Silence:** Silence is an important and purposeful tool used in Chinese communication. Pausing before giving a response indicates that someone has applied appropriate thought and consideration to the question. This signifies politeness and respect.
- **Pointing:** It is common for people to point with their index finger. This is not considered rude.
- **Beckoning:** Beckoning is done by facing the palm of one's hand to the ground and waving one's fingers towards oneself.
- **Feet:** Displaying the soles of one's feet, using one's feet to move something or putting one's feet on furniture is considered rude.
- **Whistling:** Whistling is considered rude.
- **Waving:** 'No' may be indicated by waving the hand in front of one's face.

- **Body Language:** Shrugging shoulders and winking are both gestures that are not always understood by Chinese people.

Other Considerations

- Red and gold are considered to be lucky colours by the Chinese. However, writing in red is taboo – it was historically used to write bad news or indicate that someone is a blood enemy. Black is the colour usually associated with death.
- Numbers: Odd numbers are considered unlucky, so gifts should be given in even numbers. Four, however, is considered an unlucky number while eight is the luckiest. Six connotes progress and smooth development, and nine is the emperor's number.
- Spitting in public is common in some regions of China. The behaviour is necessitated by some health conditions caused by the effects of pollution.
- Air pollution is a serious problem in China, as smog is thick over urban areas. Chinese people may avoid talking about pollution to foreigners as there can be shame associated with it. Others might be open about the topic, but it's still a good idea to approach it with sensitivity.
- The government plays a different role in the lives of Chinese residents. It may involve itself in their daily activities, and some measures have an extreme impact on people's personal choices (e.g. the now-defunct One-child policy). There is a general expectation of widespread surveillance in the country. The Chinese government has been known to continue monitoring Chinese residents living in or visiting Australia. Many public spaces in China have political and governmental figures and emblems throughout them to promote loyalty.
- The relationship between Taiwan and China is a very sensitive topic. Be considerate of its complexities should it arise in conversations. Many of the younger generation of Taiwanese wish to define themselves as distinct from China. On the other hand, many Chinese consider Taiwan to be a part of China.

Business Culture

Meetings

- Although Chinese people themselves may be late, make sure that you are punctual. If you are late, be sure to offer an apology for your tardiness. Allow a 10-minute interval for others to arrive.
- In China, people enter a meeting in order of importance, the highest-ranking person arriving first, and so on. The same goes for introductions.
- Chinese colleagues may applaud when you are introduced as a way of greeting you and showing approval. If so, it is appropriate to applaud back.
- You are expected to greet everyone in the room individually, even if the group is large.
- Allow a few moments of social conversation to pass before mentioning business.
- Traditionally, the host will give a quick speech greeting everyone before discussing the topic of business.
- Be sure to emphasise the status, size, reputation and wealth of your company.
- When it's your turn to speak, begin by providing in-depth information about your company, its history, the context of the negotiations and all of the corresponding details. If you do not, expect to be asked many questions until you've covered all of this information.

- Business cards in China are also called 'name cards'.
- Receiving Business Cards: Chinese culture interprets the attention and respect you show someone's business card to be indicative of the respect you will show the individual in business. Either use both hands or the right hand alone to receive a business card. Do not put the card away immediately, but regard it carefully and place it before you on the table until everyone is seated. Do not put it in the back pocket of your pants as this could be interpreted as you sitting on their face. Similarly, do not write on a card unless directed to do so.
- Presenting Business Cards: Either use both hands or the right hand alone when giving a business card and ensure that the writing is facing the other person. Do not deal out your cards as if you were playing a game of cards, as this risks being interpreted as rude.

Negotiation Style: Relationship-Oriented

The Chinese term for negotiation, *tan pan*, combines two characters that mean 'to discuss' and 'to judge'. From a Chinese point of view, negotiations are mechanisms for building trust and harmony so that both parties can work towards reciprocal benefit. In Chinese business culture, negotiation depends on creating long-term relationships. For example, final negotiations and deals are frequently reached outside of meetings in casual settings, such as restaurants and bars.

For many Chinese, this interpersonal style of negotiating is preferred over contract-based negotiations. They prefer to cultivate partnerships that will last as opposed to making timely and efficient negotiations. For example, they favour continuing correspondence over time and sending gifts and seasonal greeting cards to maintain relationships. As a part of this long-term approach in business relationships, they generally want to know a great deal about their partners to build the trust and loyalty needed to support business in the future. You may consider many of the details and questions asked to be unrelated to the point at hand, but try to be patient and provide answers for the sake of the business relationship.

Reciprocity

Business in China largely operates on the reciprocity of favours. Once a good business relationship is established, it is likely the Chinese will voluntarily do something for you with the assumption that you will return the favour later. The idea of reciprocity is interconnected with *guanxi*, which are relationships that may also result in the exchange of connections or favours that benefit both people. Guanxi often refers to 'networking', which is reflected in the Chinese saying, "*nei wai you bie*" ("insiders are different from outsiders"). Mutual trust is essential to *guanxi*. In turn, many Chinese will prioritise relationship building, particularly in a business context.

The principle of *guanxi* commits friends, family and, at times, business colleagues to assist one another. Guanxi plays a large role in business interactions and relations. Good *guanxi* can sometimes be necessary to create opportunities that otherwise would not be accessible. Guanxi can manifest in nepotism, whereby family members or friends may be hired for jobs. In Chinese business culture, nepotism is common and is considered to guarantee employee trust and security.

Gift Giving

The Chinese like to give many gifts in business, as this can signify gratitude and appreciation, and sometimes a request for a favour. When choosing a gift, keep in mind that it is a professional gesture, and therefore the gift should not be a personal object. If you are at a loss for what gift to give, you can invite your business partner for a drink or to dinner (unless it is a member of the opposite gender, in which case the intention may be misinterpreted).

In companies with many employees, it is best to give gifts of equal value to all individuals and a more valuable one to the senior staff member (or only give gifts to the senior persons). Do not give gifts that are difficult to reciprocate or match, as this will cause the Chinese recipient to lose face. Giving expensive gifts to a business partner can also be interpreted as bribery and therefore may not be accepted.

Business Communication

- The Chinese often nod while a person speaks. This does not necessarily indicate agreement, but rather suggests that the listener understands what the speaker is saying.
- For the sake of saving face, the Chinese will seldom give a flat negative response to proposals made, even when they do not agree with it. Therefore, focus on hints of hesitation. Listen closely to what they say, but also pay careful attention to what they don't say and double-check your understanding.
- It is considered rude to interrupt, so refrain from doing so. Furthermore, if the natural conversation dynamic between you and your colleagues is to talk over one another, a Chinese person will not interrupt you to make their point heard. Therefore, try to slow down and pause between your points to give them an opportunity to speak.
- Do not immediately reject a proposal from a Chinese person or company. When you reject someone's idea, there is a risk of this being interpreted as you rejecting the person. Similarly, lead into criticism gradually rather than doing so bluntly.
- Never write something in red ink. Writing in red indicates that you are someone's blood enemy.
- To avoid confusion with your Chinese business counterpart regarding dates, write out the month in letters. If you do write a date in numbers, list the year first, followed by the month then the day. For example, 2017.09.30
- The number 8 is considered the luckiest number while the number 4 is considered unlucky.

Other Considerations

- Workplaces in China are definitively hierarchical based on age and position, and everyone has a distinct place and role within their company. Women are usually given respect in accord with their role and rank within the company hierarchy.
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- In recent years, organising or attending private banquets between companies has been forbidden by the Chinese government. Therefore, a Chinese business associate may turn down a dinner invitation out of professionalism instead of personal reasons.
- On the Corruption Perception Index (2017), China ranks 77th out of 180 countries, receiving a score of 41 (on a scale from 0 to 100). This perception suggests that the country's public sector is somewhat corrupt.