



HOTEL ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION DES HÔTELS DU CANADA

Canadian Hospitality for Chinese Guests

Rules of Conduct, Tips on Etiquette, and general Cultural Information on the world's largest potential single travel market

Prepared by
The Hotel Association of Canada
June 16, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	2
<i>Characteristics of Chinese Culture</i>	3
A Deep Historical Foundation	3
<i>Religion and Spirituality</i>	4
Confucianism	4
<i>Forms of Thought</i>	5
Rules of Conduct	5
Business Conduct	6
Negotiations	6
<i>Travel Facts and Issues</i>	7
Strong Growth in Outbound Travel	7
<i>Leisure Activities</i>	8
Relatively New Concept	8
Socializing and Shopping	8
<i>Eating and Drinking Habits</i>	8
<i>Suggestions on Etiquette and Protocol for Canadian Service Providers</i>	9

Preface

Tourist industry professionals are all in agreement: the potential of the Chinese market, which represents a total of 1.3 billion inhabitants, is enormous. Forecasts show that Chinese tourists will potentially make 800,000 overnight stays in 10 years.

This figure is impressive but not unrealistic: growth is developing at breathtaking speed. For over 20 years, the Chinese economy has grown by 8% annually and there is no indication that this situation is likely to change in the coming years. Increasing numbers of Chinese people have sufficient income to be able to afford a trip to Canada. But our Far Eastern guests have high hopes and expectations of Canada, their holiday destination. We must, therefore, adopt the correct form of tact and diplomacy, and show ourselves to be most welcoming in our hospitality.

In terms of succeeding in our business affairs with Chinese tourists, cultural sensitivity with regard to their needs and expectations play a key role. Aside from having brochures, menus and leaflets translated into Chinese, we must also take into consideration the customs in the Far East, in organizing holiday or leisure activities, as well as in accommodating preferences in meals and in-room decoration.

It should be noted here that Chinese social conduct and etiquette differ somewhat to those of the Western Hemisphere, and those differences should be accommodated in order to achieve a most agreeable relationship with your Chinese clientele.

Characteristics of Chinese Culture

A Deep Historical Foundation

One of Chinese culture's most pronounced traits are its deep roots in history, which span almost five millennia. Despite various ruptures and discontinuities in this tremendously long and rich history, the Chinese see themselves as guardians of a unique heritage. Their history serves as a reference point for many customs, traditions and practices, whether in the form of iconic figures, such as Confucius, or recognized fact, and even epic tales.

The formation of the empire in 221 BC began a heritage of dynasties that bound the country together. The perception of China as a whole entity stems from this heritage, where the emperor exercised his power from a totally centralized and hierarchical administration. The Imperial period continued until 1911, and after a period of instability, the Communist Revolution brought about the advent of People's Republic of China. Economic and cultural transitional pains took hold until the death of Mao Tse Tung, the father of Chinese Communism. The country then redeveloped its export market system and since then has experienced very strong economic growth over the last half century, showing percentage growths of 8% annually every year for the last two decades, and this trend does not show any signs of slowing down.

Modern Chinese society is complex. Various elements of Chinese social, political and economic functionality contradict the more foundational and historic doctrines. One of the overarching elements of Chinese societal identity is the concept of rights and obligations. Rights belong to society; obligations belong to the individual. This notion extends from the holistic concept of a unified Chinese society. A greatly advantageous characteristic of Chinese society, however, is its ability to incorporate external thoughts and practices.

Religion and Spirituality

Three major spiritual and/or ideological paths are outlined below, as an indicator of the mindset of Chinese ways of looking at life:

Confucianism

According to Confucius, a philosopher from about 500 BC, man must conform to social order and tradition. This philosophical doctrine became so strongly held that it became state ideology. This extends to all aspects of life, public and private, and denotes the necessity for roles, be they official as in ministerial, or familial, such as the relationship between father and son or husband and wife. The reciprocity of responsibility has primacy.

Taoism

Taoism is a passive approach to existence, preaching compromise and conflict resolution through detachment. Meditation and other characteristics of an ascetic life are recommended through Taoism.

Buddhism

Buddhism has its roots in India, and reached China about 2000 years ago. It introduced the concept of karma, or the retribution of actions, and ideas of reincarnation into Chinese life. Modifications of Buddhism have been developed through a synthesis with Confucianism and other domestic philosophies and ideologies.

Forms of Thought

The Chinese are pragmatic. Functionality and results are primary motivators: that which works is true. According to the tradition of the yin and yang, man must understand the movement and constant dynamics of these two opposing but complementary forces to maintain harmony in life.

Developing relationships is of great importance to the Chinese. Reciprocity is integral in relationship building, as in one good turn deserves another.

In keeping with the yin and yang concept and maintaining harmony, there are an abundance of practices and beliefs, such as:

- Favourable words: proverbs, maxims
- Animals: incorporation of images of the dragon, phoenix, crane, fish and tortoise. All are considered good omens
- Certain flora
- Certain characters are regarded as bringers of good fortune or longevity
- Colours have symbolic value as well; red is for good fortune, yellow is imperial, white is the colour of mourning
- Numbers: “8” sounds like the word fortune, and is therefore considered lucky. “4” is similar to the word for “death”, and has an opposite value

Rules of Conduct

During an exchange, it is essential to remember that Chinese culture is traditionally based on inequality of status. This is of paramount importance on rules of conduct.

- Establishing the rank of an individual is a vital factor. This involves, for example, handing a business card with both hands at the beginning of a meeting. Much more than just a piece of paper, the business card provides vital information for knowing what behaviour is appropriate. The card should be studied at length
- Personal image, which encompasses social standing and moral integrity, is used to establish trust and to check that the person is worthy of trust. Without this highly personal touch from the outset, it will not be possible to build on the relationship
- Protocol assumes great importance, as it must ensure that people are treated strictly according to their rank

- The order of precedence must closely follow the hierarchy of status, and then comes the respect afforded to elders. Rules of gallantry generally do not apply

Final note: When discussing an issue with a Chinese client, it is recommended to be indirect and diplomatic in your approach. Debate and discourse in Chinese society is reserved and modest, and attempts to avoid anger and direct confrontation.

Business Conduct

Long-term vision is paramount

- Understand that the negotiation process calls for deep personal involvement. Progress is made cautiously, step by step
- Emphasize a long-term partnership, as opposed to short-term objectives.
- Favour an amicable and peaceful atmosphere, which is key to ensuring harmony
- Without trust, without good relations and without compromise, there will be no business deals

Negotiations

- Pay close attention to seating arrangements, as the highest-ranking persons sit opposite each other at the centre of a long table, furthest from the door.
- At dinner, the best seating place is to the right of the host, the next best to his left. The place of honour is opposite the door, but is far from it, and, if possible, faces south. The lowest-ranking person occupies the most vulnerable place, with the back to the door.
- Respect the speaking order. Express yourself slowly and in an intelligible manner, without interrupting the other party.
- Set aside ample time, as haste is ill advised
- Understand that Chinese culture expects important information to be revealed only towards the end of any negotiation
- Do not continue negotiations during the meal that follows, although this period is essential to the success of the process
- Use interpreters who possess an excellent level of language skill and who are trained in the relevant area

Travel Facts and Issues

Strong Growth in Outbound Travel

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates that in the year 2020 about 100 million Chinese will be traveling abroad. In 2003 the number of Chinese tourists reached 20.2 million, a growth of 21.7% compared to 2002. The number of Chinese traveling abroad quadrupled during the 1990s, and that trend is set to continue through the next two decades as the country's middle class grows steadily.

The government is also easing restrictions on its citizens obtaining passports as well as the amount of money they can take abroad. It is furthermore expected that flexible holidays will be introduced soon in order to move away from the current practice of the entire country going on vacation at the same time. Two measures that will give outbound travel an additional boost.

Leisure Activities

When traveling, the Chinese will have tastes and expectations that differ somewhat to those of the Western (North America and Europe) tourist. Some notable suggestions for conduct and etiquette are below.

Relatively New Concept

The notion of leisure is still rather new to Chinese society. In fact, no clear distinction is made between the time spent at work and the time dedicated to family, friends or hobbies. Working life and more private moments are not considered to be mutually exclusive. It should also be noted in this context that Chinese employees and entrepreneurs have less time off work than their European colleagues.

Socializing and Shopping

The Chinese tend to relate to more “busy” atmospheres, as they apply more directly to environments in larger cities in China. Enjoying a stroll in the evening after dinner among a downtown crowd, entertaining guests and family at home, and indulging in shopping are among the more popular activities.

Sports, however, do not rank as high for the Chinese as it does for the Western Hemisphere in terms of leisure activities.

The concept of “saving money at home and spending it abroad” for the Chinese, is quite prevalent. Presents and gifts for family and friends back home are a noticeable portion of spending habits among Chinese travellers, especially branded products with local characteristics (e.g. stuffed Moose).

Eating and Drinking Habits

Much of Chinese daily life revolves around food. Eating and dining are important social events. Typically, food is consumed at a large table with a large gathering of family and/or friends.

Keep in mind, therefore, as a service provider, that this is an important element to ensuring a hospitable reception for your Chinese guests.

Drinking habits are not dissimilar, however. The usual selection of wine, beer, water and soft drinks, along with hot tea or hot water would be quite adequate.

Suggestions on Etiquette and Protocol for Canadian Service Providers

- Treat your Chinese guests respectfully. They are proud to be citizens of the PRC, as well as of the political and economic success of their country. Discussions on politically sensitive matters like human rights, regional independence movements, etc., should be conducted with great care and diplomacy
- Always be sure to display the correct PRC flag
- Many Chinese only have limited ability in languages like English, French and German. Chinese-language signs and literature in the more popular tourist spots and destinations are of paramount importance to create an air of hospitality
- Chinese-speaking guides are a must to accompany travellers from the PRC during their stay in Canada. They should, therefore, be trained appropriately and thoroughly
- Provide complete and concise information in Chinese on the main sights and attractions of your region and/or destination. One booklet or leaflet including a map in Chinese is often enough. This is especially smart as a marketing tool for hotel operators
- The Chinese client is more often than not a “last minute traveller”. Plans are not necessarily thoroughly planned. Show flexibility and speedy responses to requests
- Clearly indicate the capacities for receiving groups at your hotel or restaurant to the relevant tour operator(s)
- If at all possible, do not assign rooms or tables to your Chinese guests with the number “4” incorporated into them, or reserve rooms for them on the 4th floor. “6”, “8”, or “9”, are generally considered lucky numbers, and therefore hold much higher positive symbolic value
- Provide clear operational instructions in Chinese about Pay-TV products. Indicate the fee is NOT included in the room rate or package, if it is not
- Assign your Chinese guests rooms with twin beds.
- Ensure fast check-in and checkout service.

- Hotel rooms should ideally be equipped with Chinese-to-North American electrical adapters for small appliances
- Always ensure access to hot water for drinking for your Chinese guests. Hot tea and hot water are imbibed at almost any time of day, and served with lunch and dinner as well
- Ensure all appropriate amenities are available for your guest, such as shampoos, toothbrush and toothpaste, etc, in your Chinese guests' rooms. They tend to travel light
- Group activities are more prevalent for Chinese tourists. Be sure to incorporate this factor when making leisure activity suggestions
- Dinner usually takes place earlier, around 7pm., and evenings usually run late. Suggestions on venues with shows and entertainment are recommended
- Chinese speaking staffs are a pre-requisite for successful business transactions
- Clearly display merchandise prices
- Adapt to the shopping habits of your Chinese guests. Their preference lies in shopping in the evenings and on weekends
- There is a propensity for Chinese tourists to travel in groups. Be prepared to accommodate such logistics
- Be sure to inform your Chinese clients of GST refund possibilities for goods purchased in Canada and exported to the PRC. A Chinese-language pamphlet is recommended
- In restaurants, a basic selection of Chinese food, such as rice, stewed or fried vegetables and slices meat such as beef, chicken, pork or veal, or fish, should be available at all meals
- Assortments of flavours and textures are preferred while dining. Make sure to incorporate many different complementary flavours at the table
- It is the custom to leave immediately after a meal. Quick, efficient service is therefore recommended

- Together with the customary cutlery, chopsticks should be supplied. They should always be placed on the right side of the bowl or dish. Never stick the chopsticks into the dish or bowl. It is considered bad luck.