



Cultural IQ Newsletter

Fostering Connections, Illuminating Insights

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Issue # 3 February 5th, 2009

Cultural Intelligence - Chinese *Gifts* Etiquette

The second in a series of Cultural IQ Articles

“Courtesy suggests reciprocity” - Confucius

Giving a gift is a social gesture that may be expected in some countries, and could be considered a bribe in others. Knowing the gift guidelines and etiquette for China and Chinese people will help make your meetings or relationship building not only a success but an enjoyable experience.

Unlike in Canada or North America, where appreciation for a business transaction can be expressed through a thank-you card or thank-you note, or promotional items with the



company's logo and name on it, presenting a special gift to Chinese can be very much appreciated and serves as an important step towards nurturing the relationship and bringing the parties involved that much closer.

As important as the concept of “**Guan Xi**” in the success of business and personal relationships with the Chinese, gift-giving also plays an interesting role in building and maintaining this “**Guan Xi**”.

One of my clients was once immersed in a series of negotiations attempting to sell a machining centre to one of the key refrigerator motor manufacturers in Zhejiang Province. Before his next trip to resume the final price

discussions, he was informed by chance through his agent in China that the owner of the company was a huge fan of the AC Milan football club. It so happened that my client's daughter has a girlfriend, whose boyfriend works with AC Milan. Here comes the creative part: my client bought a football, asked her daughter's friend's help in acquiring some signatures from the key players in the club, and brought the football to China during his scheduled trip. Guess what? The final price discussion went much smoother than the previous ones. And he scored the order!

Now, don't rush into a conclusion that gifts are the only important thing. Don't get me wrong. No matter how nice or well-thought a gift could be, it can absolutely not replace or override the competitiveness of your product / service, which is the core of any business dealings.

Gift-giving is the icing on the cake in terms of building "**Guan Xi**" with Chinese!

General Gift-Giving tips

- It's appropriate to give gifts during your very first visit, both business and social.
- Give something that represents or is unique from your country or community.
- When bestowing a gift, find something the whole family can use, for instance wine, tea or Canadian maple syrup can be a good choice.
- In order not to appear greedy, a gift will not be immediately taken, but refused three times before finally being accepted. Each time it's refused, you as the giver must graciously continue to offer the gift. And once it's taken, tell the person you're happy it's been accepted.
- Don't be offended if the person does not open the gift in front of you. Chinese people do not usually open a gift in front of the giver.
- A gift should be offered using both hands, and must be gift-wrapped.
- In business, show sensitivity to people's status. Give the similar type of gift to people at the same level. Giving a gift only to an individual in front of a group is not appropriate. It's better to present it in private and mention that it's a gesture of your friendship, not business-related.
- Be sure the value of the gift is not extravagant.

Sensitivities in Gift-Giving

In Chinese culture, symbolism is important, with colors and numbers having special meanings. You don't wish your well-intended gift to be an insult. Therefore it pays to keep in mind the following:

Colors

- **Red** is a lucky color that represents good fortune, prosperity, and happiness.
- **Black and White** are associated with death and funerals.
- **Gold** is associated with high status and prosperity.

Numbers

- 8 is the luckiest number, it's associated with money and fortune
- 4 is equated with "death" in Chinese, so it's better to avoid number 4
- 9 is the second best number, because it's considered the highest number, in fact the number of steps in the *Forbidden City* or the *Temple of Heaven* always ends in 9

- Even numbers are considered luckier than odd numbers

What to avoid?

You don't want to inadvertently select a gift that has a negative or unlucky association. For instance a **clock** should be avoided as a gift because it literally means "Your days are numbered!" Don't consider sharp objects like **knives or scissors** because they represent a 'severing of a friendship or relationship'- including a business relationship.



Exchanging gifts properly with Chinese is an important social practice which helps to build rapport, strengthen "**Guan Xi**", and lead towards long-term business success and lasting relationships.

Visit **Cultural IQ** website for on-going Cultural Intelligence and international business tips.

China Watch – I LOVE Beijing

Hello everyone,

I have seen a lot of cities: Paris, London, Munich, Milan, Berlin, Rome, Singapore, Shanghai, etc. Beautiful cities, however you never feel what you feel when you are in Beijing.

From the odor of the sour soy juice to the scent of Capuccino floating from Starbucks; from the last rays of sunset cast on the high red walls of Forbidden City, to the glimmering lights on the twin towers of the Beijing World Trade Centre, in one city you feel that history flows like a river.

I have lived in this city for 25 years, yet there is always something in it that I feel fascinated by. Perhaps it's because Beijing is home to numerous dynasties one thousand years ago. Perhaps it's because of the new highways, airports, the Birds' Nest and the Water Cubic.

Love and Beijing, you have to feel it.

I felt partly like a tourist during my trip last December, and I wish to share with you some photographs.

When you have plans to travel there, whether it's for business or pleasure, please let me know. I will introduce you to the right people to talk to or the memorable places to see.

See you in Beijing.

Christine Gao, M.Ed, PCC



Peking University, where I received my M.Ed, has a history of more than 100 years.

"Si He Yuan", a historical type of residence only found in Beijing.



A picture of Wang Fu Jing Boulevard, downtown Beijing.

What's happening?

Few seats left, Register NOW!

One day Seminar and Discovery Session Accessing the **Chinese** market by Developing “*Guan Xi*”

Feb.21st, Saturday
North York Central Library

Do you want a share of the **Chinese market** here and
abroad?

What business opportunities does **China** have waiting for
you?

Register before Mon.Feb.9th, cost will be ~~\$140~~ \$160

6–Week Chinese *Culture* and *Heritage* Learning Group

*For those who are fascinated by or have a love for Chinese culture and want to
learn more about it, this group is for you.*

*Join this 6-week Learning and Discovery group, you will embark on a special
voyage of different aspects of Chinese culture and Heritage....*

Contents and learning outcome: *Each meeting will introduce a different topic
with a guest speaker who specializes in the subject matter.*

Week 1: Documentary Film on contemporary Chinese life; the concept of Three China

Week 2: Must-read books to understand Chinese culture and values (36 Strategies, The Art of War)

Week 3: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Yin & Yang, and philosophy of Chinese medicine

Week 4: Healthy Chinese cooking, the Four Famous Cuisines and importance of balance

Week 5: Tai Chi, Qi Gong and Basic Principles of Feng Shui

Week 6: Forms of Art and Entertainment: Peking Opera, Chinese calligraphy and painting

When does the group start? Group Starts **March 21, 2009 Saturday**. Meets every Saturday from 2:30 –4:30 pm

Where to meet? Each meeting will happen at a possible different location depending on the topic.

Fee schedule:

- Sign up for Whole 6-week package upfront: you get one meeting for free: **\$175**
- Any 3 meetings (half package): **\$105**
- Choose any one: **\$40**

Group leader and facilitator: Christine Gao

How to register or any questions:

Contact Christine Gao @ 647-989-5678, or Christine_gao@hotmail.com

In the Calendar

Spring begins officially in China on Feb.4th

According to the 24 Solar Terms which date back thousands of years in China, Spring officially begins on Feb.4th. Animals and plants begin to wake from the long winter. Farmers will start another year of agricultural work.



There was also a touch of spring last Sunday in Toronto. This picture was taken at Harborfront. Spring is definitely around the corner! Hope the spring of a world economic recovery is not too far away.



Warmest regards
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Your comments, feedback, questions are highly appreciated. Send me an email at Christine_gao@hotmail.com with any suggestions you may have.