

CHINESE CULTURAL TIPS

PERSONAL DISTANCE/SPEECH

- Your Chinese friend may converse from a greater distance than you find usual. They also do not touch people as much; no hugging, kissing, or other touching except for family and very close friends. However, two female friends may hold hands with each other while walking.
- Asian speech patterns often have pauses in conversation. They will not be quick to reply, but give time to make sure you are finished with your thought.
- “Face” is an important concept in Chinese culture. Do not criticize anything (décor, food, clothes, children), give suggestions for improvement unless asked, or even ask “why?” something seems strange.
- Do not start a political discussion about the Chinese government. People have many different views and many different reasons for coming to Canada from the People’s Republic, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. Whatever they may think about the government, they are proud of their country’s long history, culture, and civilization.

FOOD/DINING

- For Chinese who want to entertain guests, it is more common to take them to a restaurant than to dine at home. The person who invites pays for the whole party; there is no splitting the cheque. Some Buddhists are vegetarians.
- If you visit a Chinese home, it is normal to bring a small gift: candy, flowers, or something you made yourself. Gifts, as well as business cards, should be presented and accepted with two hands. As in most Canadian homes, shoes are removed at the door. You may want to bring your own slippers or the host may offer some.
- In your own home, it is polite to have some slippers for guests. Always be sure to offer something to drink. Many Chinese prefer hot drinks to cold, even in the summer.

HONOR/POWER DISTANCE

- It is very important to respect older people and those in authority. Greet the oldest person first. If you are a person in a position of authority (teacher, pastor, police) you must be aware that people may give you responses that they think you want, or hide their disagreement to defer to you. Don’t ask “Do you understand?” but ask for feedback that indicates understanding.
- The honor of the family is communicated to children as a reason to work hard and succeed. As a group-oriented culture, people will make decisions and sacrifices to benefit their family before pursuing individual goals.

NAMES

- Traditionally, Chinese names start with the family name, following the personal name. Many people who move to Canada will reverse this order to conform to Anglo norms. Many people take an English personal name to make it easier for their friends and colleagues. Married women usually do not take their husband’s name, but some do. A person in a position of authority should be addressed with their title (Officer, Pastor, Captain) and then their last name. The best idea is to ask what is their preferred name.