
CULTURE SHOCK

Martin Wolff, China Foreign Expert
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INTRODUCTION

Foreign teachers throughout China experience culture shock. Culture shock is nothing new; it is the subject of numerous books. Foreign teachers in China have found a way of expressing their culture shock in public forums, without being banned for negativity. There are many internet forums where foreign teachers can post their culture shock experiences. When they observe certain Chinese characteristics that are completely opposite to their own western culture, they exclaim that if they ever act that way, it is time for them to leave China because they have been here for so long that they are acting just like the Chinese.

These forum postings can be very informative to foreigners contemplating employment in China. They can be a valuable forewarning as to what to expect. However, they can also constitute the basis for a comparative culture study. They can be used as the basis for an oral English class discussion.

The following Chinese characteristics have been commented upon by foreign teachers from throughout the western world and have been compiled for use in a western culture class. (Some of the postings are offensive to the Chinese students and must be presented with some care and sensitivity. Many of the postings will evoke emotional, even defensive reactions, both of which help to transform the western culture course from a lecture in a vacuum course into an interactive course.)

COMPARATIVE CULTURE DISCUSSION COURSE

For each Chinese characteristic mentioned below, write an answer to the following:

1. Is it really a Chinese characteristic?
2. What is the reason for this Chinese characteristic?
3. Why do you think this creates culture shock for the foreign teacher?
4. What do you think is the western culture?
5. Is the foreigner's comment offensive to you? Why?
6. Guess which country the foreigner is from

YOU KNOW YOU HAVE BEEN IN CHINA too long when -

You take your bird for a walk

You never think of saying sorry or excuse me when you bump into someone

You're at an expensive western restaurant and don't even notice the guy at the next table yelling into his cell phone

You enjoy karaoke

You walk backwards in the park listening to a transistor radio

The China Daily is your source for hard hitting, fast breaking, and investigative journalism

You smoke in crowded elevators.

All white people look the same to you

You like the smell of the bus.

You find state-employed retail staff helpful, knowledgeable and friendly

You no longer need tissues to blow your nose

You find western toilets uncomfortable

You throw your used toilet paper in the basket (as a courtesy to the next person)

You think that the heavy air actually contains valuable nutrients that you need to stay Healthy.

You think a 30 year old woman who carries a Hello Kitty lunch box is cute

A sexual pervert is a man who prefers women to money.

It's OK to throw rubbish, including old fridges, from your 18th-floor window

You believe that pressing the lift button 63 times will make it move faster

You aren't aware that one is supposed to pay for software

You are not surprised to see your tap water run dark brown

You tell your parents their house back in your home country has bad feng shui

You think that a \$7 shirt is a rip-off

You always leave tray and trash on the table when you are in Starbucks because you insisted it is the way to keep everyone employed

You buy an XXXL T-shirt in store when you returned home (You buy an XXXL T-shirt in THE store when you RETURN home)

You take large sum of cash whenever you go hospital in home country (You take A large sum of cash whenever you go TO THE hospital in YOUR home country)

YOU WRITE IN Chinglish.

You have no reservations about spitting sun flower seeds on the restaurant floor

You think it's silly to buy a new bike when it'll get stolen soon and stolen bikes are half the price.

You'd rather pay the 10 yuan for an all night stay at the internet cafe than the 30 for a taxi home.

You feel cheated if you don't receive a full head and shoulder massage when getting a haircut

You blow your nose or spit on the restaurant floor (of course after making a loud hocking noise)

You no longer wait in line, but go immediately to the head of the queue

It becomes exciting to see if you can get on the lift before anyone can get off

It is no longer surprising that the only decision made at a meeting is the time and venue for the next meeting

You no longer wonder how someone who earns US\$ 400.00 per month can drive a Mercedes

You accept the fact that you have to queue to get a number for the next queue

You believe everything you read in the local newspaper

You have developed an uncontrollable urge to follow people carrying small flags

You regard it as part of the adventure when the waiter correctly repeats your order and the cook makes something completely different.

You are not surprised when three men with a ladder show up to change a light bulb

You look over people's shoulder to see what they are reading

You honk your horn at people because they are in your way as you drive down the sidewalk

When car accidents become a source of heartwarming humor

When shopping at Carrefour some laowai stares you down for catching you looking into his basket while you wonder to yourself what laowai's eat

You have figured out that it is actually the Taiwanese who are running this country

You have a pinky fingernail an inch long

You burp in any situation and don't care

You start to watch CCTV9 and feel warm and comforted by the governments great work

You think Pizza Hut is high-class and worth queuing for

You have learnt how to detect someone is in a hurry behind you, and now have the ability to not only walk very slowly but also grow eyes in the back of your head, so when they start to overtake on the right hand side, you automatically cut in and walk very slowly directly in front of them

When you are able to jump the queue because the idiot laowai left 2 centimeters between themselves and the person in front of them

You have absolutely no sense of traffic rules

You start calling other foreigners Lao Wai

You start cutting off large vehicles on your bicycle

The last time you visited your mother, you gave her your business card

You think no car is complete without a tissue box on the rear shelf and a feather duster in the trunk

You go to the local shop in pajamas

When looking out the window, you think “Wow, so many trees!” instead of “Wow, so much concrete!”

Pollution, what pollution?

You think “white pills, blue pills, and pink powder” is an adequate answer to the question “What are you giving me, doctor?”

Someone doesn’t stare at you and you wonder why

Firecrackers don’t wake you up

Your family stops asking when you’ll be coming back

You wear out your vehicle’s horn before its brakes

You buy a top-of-the-line karaoke machine

Forks feel funny

Chinese remakes of Western songs sound better than the originals

You get homesick for Chinese food when away from China

You realize that smiling and nodding is Chinese body language for, “Go away; leave me alone.”

All the top-level government officials you befriended for guanxi purposes when you first arrived are retired and living in your country

After being in an accident, you tell the ambulance driver which hospital to take you to

Your company offers you a job in your native land, and includes regular “Home Leave” to China as an incentive

You think of “salad” as diced apples in mayonnaise

You don’t bother to take the sticker off the lenses of your fake Ray-Bans

You only wear a suit when you dig ditches or do home repairs

Your handshake is weakening by the day

You compiled a 3-page list of weird English first names that Chinese people of your acquaintance have chosen for themselves.

Your collection of business cards has outgrown your flat

You and a friend get on a bus, sit at opposite ends of the bus, and continue your conversation by yelling from one end to the other

You cannot say a number without making the appropriate hand sign

You like the taste of Green Tea and Chivas

You start recognizing the Chinese songs on the radio and sing along to them with the taxi driver

You feel insulted when you enter a restaurant and only three waiters welcome you

When you go out to restaurants with friends and don't even say goodbye before getting into the car and leaving.

You hang up the phone at the end of any sentence.

You start to enjoy eating chicken feet at the bar and spitting the bones on the table or floor.

You stop looking before crossing the street because you know 99.9% of drivers will miss you?

You start to gam bei glasses of expensive red wine.

When you think that a hot cup of Nescafe 3 in 1 is an after dinner coffee.

When you feel lost back home in your grocery store when you cannot find the tub of rice or the freshly made fried chickens' feet.

When you point out other Laowai to your friends and proceed to get into a conversation about where they might be from.

When you don't even question the need to run between fifteen different tellers at the same bank in order to do a simple task like, report a stolen ATM card.

When you start to include your height, age, weight, and full head to toe pictures with new job applications (because you are the perfect look for the job!)

When the sound of a building being demolished and the dust rising after doesn't affect your morning jog.

When you fight with the shop keeper back home because you know the price can be lower and will not buy it unless it is 50 cents cheaper.

After running into a friend on the street you end the conversations with QQ me.

When you have forgotten what real packaging on a DVD looks like.

When you get excited when a shoe shop has your size shoe and immediately buy them no matter what they look like.

You know you've been in China too long when, not only have you stopped noticing people pissing on buildings in the middle of town, you've started to do it as well.

You know you've been in China too long when you've discarded all of your green hats because you actually think that it means your wife is cheating on you/will cheat on you if you wear one.

You start to gam bei; glasses of expensive red wine MIXED WITH SPRITE

You are sitting in a cafe with some friends and everyone in the room is completely busy communicating with non-present persons in all ways offered by modern mobile phones without taking any notice of each other

When you haggle because 6 rmb for a DVD is just too much

When you get the DVD before seeing the movie in the cinema.

When 10000 rmb is a lot of money... Hey that's 2 months wages!

When you don't mind paying 4 rmb with a Credit card in Carrefour on Saturday in the middle of the rush hour queue.. and that's normal ok..

When you know the way better than the taxi driver...

When you start giving instructions on how to get to places here and people seem surprised.

When you start referring to Dalian as a 'clean city'.

When you count your 'mao' to make a 'kwai' for the bus...

When your 'real' obsession is teaching

When you support a team just because it has one Chinese player in it.

When you start to believe the shop assistant in Carrefour about HER taste in wine even though she has never even tasted any...

When 'Fan bian mein' becomes your staple diet (noodles in broth)

When you have a seaweed/Turnip soup with every meal and you like it

You start sweeping puddles of water from outside your door in the rain.

You call your friends at 7am on a Sunday morning for a nice chat.

Not wearing any kind of shoes makes you feel panic. Even if you are just wearing underwear you'd rather put on your high heels while getting dressed than touching the ground with your bare feet.

You think it is fully legitimate to use the communal shower of an upscale fitness club as a toilet. You never close the door when you go to a normal restroom, so where's the difference anyway?

You would never dare to sit on any ground without covering it with newspaper. Once covered, even the dirtiest sidewalk seems like a comfortable bed to you.

If a stupid laowai asks you Why? your answer is - Because it's good for shenti!

You can sleep EVERYWHERE.

You stop shaving your armpits because a Chinese friend told you that you stop sweating if you do and anyway, it's bad for shenti.

A cell phone without anything cute such as stickers, a lot of glitter stuff or jewellery seems naked to you.

If you want to become friends with a laowai you first ask her Do you want to be my best friend? then ask for her cell phone number and finally introduce yourself. Next step is the cute photo you two will have taken in Shengli Guangchang so you can show your new best foreign friend to everyone...

If you are female - you only drink warm water, even in summer...and you think it's delicious!

When someone is asking you for directions you tell him to walk in the opposite direction from where he was coming from. It might be the right way.

On a hot day you pull your shirt up off your belly to your arm pits and put that extra arch in your back.

You answer your phone and first thing you say is Wei Ni hao.

You say OK la whenever you agree with something or somebody.

You dutifully count down the days to the start of the Beijing Olympics...only 436 days to go

When you return home and all the Laowai seem so big.

You crave chicken feet when you drink baiju.

When YOU start to lose YOUR manners.

The China Daily is your source for hard hitting, fast breaking, investigative journalism

When dog hotpot is your favorite menu item.

When you catch yourself pulling out the lead for appliances instead of just turning off the switch.

I get frustrated when a light is left on for more than 30 seconds for no reason.

You begin wearing super thin nylon socks with sandals.

You stop saying 'please'.

You'll eat anything that moves. (this is more relevant in southern China)

When you come to believe that the best way to enforce the rules is to keep them a secret.

When you feel compelled to give yourself some face, i.e. Try to convince everyone that you are more than a "gofor"; by telling them about your menial job responsibilities. Probably a PA with a title of "Vice Division Chief"

When you believe that Chinese hospitality is genuine and isn't just a grab for suckers (both foreign and local) to pour some money into a dead-end investment. Only a life-long local could be brainwashed to believe a few dinners, a couple of gam bei's, songs at the KTV and some local flesh could be enough to buy the title of a "good host"

You no longer think seeing side to side car collisions are strange and unusual.

You tie pieces of red cloth to your car in order to help protect you from side to side car collisions.

You no longer have sense of cynicism towards advertising.

You no longer have a sense of irony.

You throw trash on the ground without even thinking twice about it, all while talking about how beautiful your city is.....it's almost like a reflex.

When you believe that it is in your best interests to apply for a green card.

You take a flashlight on shopping trips because the stores can't afford the electricity for lights and you think that is OK.

You can push, shove, bump and cut with the best of them.

You mean it when you say - Don't worry. It doesn't matter.

You stare at westerners curiously

When those around you who you consider friends are more interested in the 'guangxi' than the friendship itself.

You've gotten a couple of little davits in your front teeth from eating so many sunflower/pumpkin seeds.

You don't have to speak to taxi drivers. Every cab in town has taken you home at least once, so they all know where you live

When you wear the same T-shirt your girl friend is wearing because she thinks it's romantic!

When you think wearing pink shirts and t-shirts are cool, not gay!

When you can wear the same shirt to work/university week after week!

When you think taking a shower once a week or maybe two is normal!

When you can sing the Chinese National Anthem, in Chinese.

When you salute the Chinese flag.

When you think of China as home sweet home.

You enjoy eating sunflower seeds / pumpkin seeds and feel proud of your skill to crack them with your teeth

You no longer find it odd to receive only bread when you order a Chicken and mayo sandwich.

Toilet tissue on the dinner table seems normal.

You forget what real bread taste like.

Bullshit becomes the norm. Reality is something you must pay for.

You no longer find it unusual to see traffic lights installed at a busy intersection, but aren't activated for another 6 months to a year.

You actually get out of bed to watch the 4:30 a.m. funeral fireworks even though you have no idea who died.

You say Wei ni hao on the phone to your best friend's call back home.

While posing for a photo you stick out your two fingers depicting the victory sign.

Ice cubes in beer actually make it cooler and more refreshing

Your definition of going home "early" or not staying out too late is around midnight

You have a pet bird...which you walk

When you take a cab, you give play-by-play driving directions to the driver

Water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution and unsanitary eateries no longer bother you.

You eat three regular meals a day: lunch, dinner and night snacks

When you go to the toilet you start bringing your own toilet paper

You can pick up any type of food using just your chopsticks... even peanuts.

David Wu is one of your favorite celebrities!

The footprints on the toilet seat are your own.

You stop at the top or bottom of an escalator to plan your day.

You rank the decision making abilities of your staff by how long it takes them to reply "Up To You".

You ride around on your bicycle ringing a bell for some unknown f*ing reason**

You accept without question the mechanic's analysis that the car is "Broken" and that it will cost you a lot of money to get it "Fixed".

You find that it saves time to stand and retrieve your hand luggage while the plane is on final approach.

You can shake your hands almost perfectly dry before wiping them on your trousers, or you have your suits made with terrycloth pockets.

A T-Bone steak with rice sounds just fine.

You regard traffic signals, stop signs, and copy watch peddlers with equal disdain.

When listening to the pilot prove he cannot speak English, you no longer wonder if he can understand the air traffic controller.

You have more knick-knacks than your grandmother.

You use MBA to denote a woman who is married but available.

You look over people's shoulder to see what they are reading

You throw your trash out the window of your house, your car or bus you are on

You would rather SMS someone than actually meet to talk 'face to face'

You wear nylons when it is 30 degrees outside

You honk your horn at people because they are in your way as you drive down the sidewalk

You regularly fumble for five minutes to find 10 jiao despite 10 people waiting in line behind you

Armpit hair has become a new sex game and play toy.

You start telling a story to a new expat friend about the crazy Shanghai girl you slept with 6 months ago and he replies that he knows her and she was his girlfriend at the time. Neither of you care.

You tell every girl you are married but she can be your lover.

You start to describe delusional thoughts and fantasies as "healthy passions."

Hookers buy you drinks.

You get your first case of bronchitis and you have never smoked a cigarette in your life.

The idea of seeing how this place will look at Expo 2010 actually appeals to you.

You haven't cut your finger nails in 8 weeks.

In a meeting you say everything will be 'wonderful' and give no details.

You forget that the other person needs to finish speaking before you can start

You burp in any situation and don't care.

You see one foreign person eating Pineapple (or whatever) and say "Yes, all foreign people like Pineapple"

You start to watch CCTV9 and feel warm and comforted by the governments great work.

You think Pizza Hut is high-class and worth queuing for.

You go shopping to buy gifts for a future business partner, just to 'smooth things along'

When having conversations with your friends you start leaving unnecessary words or letters out of sentences and end up talking like an imbecile

In the rain, you spot a vacant taxi which is 10 minutes away and you have already planned how you are going to jump out with great enthusiasm in the road, elbow everyone else trying to claim it, and wave your hands everywhere in a 'look at me I'm a goal keeper' kind of fashion

You tell your boss yes, but do exactly what you want,

You see people outside wearing shower caps in the rain, and instead of thinking what a freak, you actually understand the practicality behind it. The same with clipping pegs on your trousers when riding a bike

Your eating manners in restaurants are now totally shot. Elbows on tables and spitting food out onto your plate is now seen as being dead classy

When you turn the volume on the television in the restaurant up so high that you cannot hear what the person across the table from you is saying

When you insist on paying the bill and fumble with your purse or wallet so long that the other person pays anyway

When you sit in the restaurant with your finger up your nose to your elbow and stare at the laowai. Then you pull it out, inspect it, roll it into a ball and casually flick it onto the wall or the closest person's plate

When you wear nylon knee-highs with your best dress

Before asking someone's age, you ask what animal they are.

You start picking at other people's dinner plates before they even offer you a taste.

You eat family style at any and all restaurants, Chinese or not.

You would rather wait on the street for an extra ten minutes for a small cab, than pay the extra for a big cab.

It seems entirely sensible to take a cab across town for 12 yuan in each direction to buy something that costs 4 yuan, and they sell right outside your house anyway.

You invite friends over for dinner, and serve thousand year old eggs as an appetiser.

You buy a round trip air ticket in China.

Other foreigners seem foreign to you.

You consider McDonalds a treat.

You ask how much people are making and expect people to answer.

You talk louder than is necessary.

You are the last of your first group of friends still in China.

Chinese fashion starts looking hip.

You no longer notice the hooting on the streets.

You agree that Chinese cities are beautiful.

Your body no longer needs dairy products.

You think Yangshou is a nice place for a holiday.

The last time you visited your mother, you gave her your business card

You start to enjoy the taste of bai jiu.

You go back home for a short visit, get in a car and start giving the driver directions in Chinese.

You have to pause and translate your phone number into English before telling it to someone.

Your idea of a larger home is an extra 10 square meters.

You get used to having a before dinner, during dinner, and after dinner cigarette.

You wouldn't think of buying any appliance that doesn't come in lime green.

You wonder why none of your friends back home have VCD players

You see some real cleavage and think WOW!

You ask fellow foreigners the all-important question "How long have you been here?" in order to be able to properly categorize them.

You speak Putonghua better than the locals.

You buy the local newspaper because you forget that you can't read Chinese.

You notice you've forgotten how to tie shoelaces.

You seriously contemplate putting bathroom tiles on the outside of your house back home.

You can swear in 3 different dialects.

You start wearing long thermal underwear on October 1st no matter what the temperature is.

You stop wearing long thermal underwear on May 1st no matter what the temperature is.

You phone an English-speaking laowai friend and somehow can't bring yourself to get to the point for the first 3 minutes of the conversation.

You stop enjoying telling newcomers to China 'all about China'.

You think "English literature major" is a polite way to say peanut brained bimbo.

You are not surprised to wake up in the morning and find that the woman who stayed over last night has completely cleaned your apartment, even though you'll probably never ever meet her again.

You develop a liking for corn flavoured ice cream.

You think the best part of TV is the commercials.

When you think it's alright to stick your head into a stranger's apartment to see if anybody's home.

You think that you can impress foreigners by drinking Budweiser.

You have run out of snappy comebacks to compliments about your chopstick skills.

Someone doesn't stare at you and you wonder why.

70 degrees F. feels cold.

You see three people on a motorcycle and figure there's room for two more.

"Squid" sounds better than "steak".

There are more things strapped to your cycle than you ever put in a car.

Looking at a dog makes you hungry.

Your family stops asking when you'll be coming back.

You don't mind when your date picks his/her nose in public.

You (male) wear white socks with your business suits.

You (female) wear socks over your pantyhose in summer.

People who knew you when you first arrived don't recognize you.

You speak Chinese to your foreign friends.

None of your shoes have laces.

Chinese stop you on the street to ask for directions.

You leave the plastic on all new purchases.

The shortest distance between two points involves going through an alley.

People who haven't seen you for months don't ask where you've been.

Metal scaffolding at construction sites seems much more dangerous than bamboo scaffolding.

The only foreigners who have been here longer than you are buried here.

You find yourself saying, "Oh geez, not ANOTHER Year of the Rat!"

You get homesick for Chinese food when away from China.

It becomes a tradition that at least part of Christmas dinner is stir-fried.

Other foreigners give you a funny look when you tell them how long you've been here.

The Statute of Limitations has expired and you still don't go home.

The Lunar Calendar ALWAYS takes precedence.

Pizza just doesn't taste right unless there's corn on it.

It's been at least 18 months since you used the word "tacky" to describe anything.

Summers are too short; winters too long.

250cc is a REALLY BIG motorcycle. (You think moving from a 125cc to a 150cc makes you more macho.)

Smoking is one of the dinner courses.

Eating at 'Western' restaurants, you wait until after dessert to drink your soup.

Your thumbnail is 2 inches long.

None of CNN's "China Experts" have been here as long as you.

You salt your fruit.

That unopened bottle of XO has aged longer on your living room shelf than it ever did in France.

Your company offers you a job in your native land, and includes regular “Home Leave” to China as an incentive.

Household furnishings are arranged for optimal feng-shui.

You can make elevators go faster by boarding first and taking over the controls.

You stop calling the Guinness Book of Records people each time you kill a cockroach.

You don’t recognize a bowl of chicken soup unless there’s feet and a head in it.

Your favorite pizza toppings are corn and shrimp.

You get up at 4:00 a.m. to watch the funeral fireworks even though you have no idea who died.

In the summer, you roll the legs of your pants up to your knees whenever you sit down.
(men) And you roll your shirt up to your nipples.

You only wear a suit when you dig ditches or do home repairs.

You have a purse and you are male.

You go to the hospital at the first signs of a cold.

You don’t notice your gastrointestinal problems anymore.

You draw characters on your hand to make yourself understood.

You can’t put a proper sentence together in your native language.

You would never think of entering your house without first removing your shoes.

Drilling on the walls in the wee small hours in the morning is considered acceptable behaviour.

You use the word “Ayyieeaaahh” every few sentences to convey surprise, pleasure, pain or anger.

You know that leather shoes can grow leaves during the wet season.

You do not mind last minute schedule changes.

You speak enough Chinese to make your colleagues laugh their heads off (attempts with anyone else still only draw blank stares).

You always get a seat on a bus.

You get on a bus alone and pretend to have a friend at the other end of the bus!

You cannot say “Call me.” without making a pretend phone with your fingers and sticking to your ear.

You eat at exactly the same time every day, whether you are hungry or not. Then eat again later when you ARE hungry.

You think a pedestrian crossing over the street is ‘beautiful’.

You start making lists like this.

When you can relate to all these issues in these posts

CONCLUSION

Some of the westerner's observations may appear funny and others just plain strange. For those western teachers undeterred, and are intent upon taking up a position in China, just keep two rules in mind:

1. Flexible people do not break
2. Nothing is as it appears.

This will lessen anxiety and reduce the need for early or premature departure from China.