

# Company culture in China

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL  
Upper-intermediate

NUMBER  
EN\_BE\_3909X

LANGUAGE  
English

lingoda





## Goals

- Can understand typical business culture and conduct in China
- Can use new terminology and understanding to speak about self in a context of small talk in a business setting





China is the most populous country in the world, and the fourth largest in terms of size. China is an extremely important country in terms of **international business**.

The Chinese economy is the fastest growing economy in the world and the country is also the world's leading exporter.



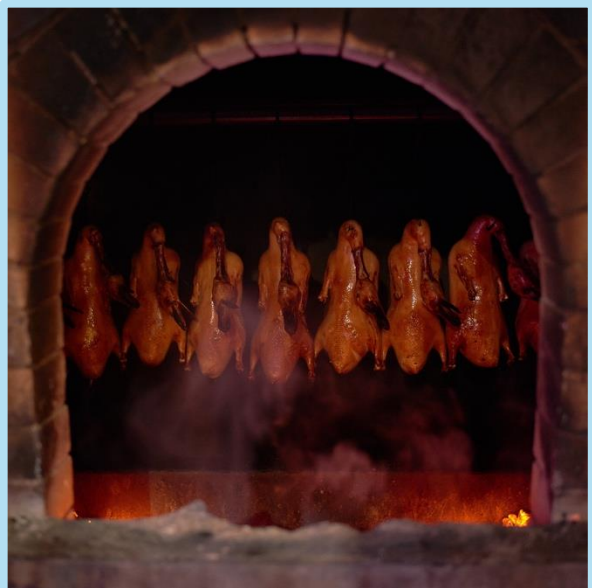
# China

What do you already know about China?





## Chinese cuisine



Chinese cuisine is an important part of Chinese culture and varies greatly from province to province. Have you ever tried Chinese food before? Did you like it? In what ways is it similar or different to the cuisine in your home country?



## China fact file 1

China, officially known as the *People's Republic of China*, has a population of 1.4 billion and is the world's most populous country. The country is ruled by the Communist Party of China.

China is one of the world's earliest civilisations and has the longest continuous history of any country in the world. The major religions of the country are Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Taoism and the predominant language of the country is Mandarin Chinese.

The country is a fast rising global superpower, in terms of both economy and military growth. Up until 2015, China was the world's fastest growing global economy and over the past 30 years growth rates have averaged around 10%. The People's Liberation Army, the armed forces of The People's Republic of China, is the largest military in the world.

**Read the China fact file with your teacher. Check you understand the vocabulary in the text.**



## China fact file 1

China is sometimes nicknamed, “the world’s factory” since the country is the world’s largest exporter of goods. For this reason it plays a crucial role in international business. Some important corporations based in China include: Sony, Huawei, Bank of China and Key Safety Systems.

China is an extremely important market player and more and more international firms are doing business in the country. An essential part of doing successful business in China is having an awareness of Chinese culture, and especially corporate culture within the country. There are a number of notable differences between Chinese and Western corporate culture especially.

**Read the China fact file with your teacher. Check you understand the vocabulary in the text!**



## Useful phrases

you obviously take  
a keen interest in...

You obviously take a keen interest in cooking. What is your favourite dish to make?

what do you  
think about...?

What do you think about my preliminary designs?

how do you  
find...?

How do you find the climate in Europe?

application

Please submit your job application by the end of the week.

to apply for a job

I've applied for the job, I'm just waiting to hear back.

to get to know  
someone

I want to get to know my new colleagues better so we are all going out for dinner after work on Friday.





## Guanxi and a different approach to working relationships

- Corporate culture in China operates on a far more personal level compared with western cultures. Of crucial importance when doing business in China is building **guanxi**, the Chinese term for personal connections. However, building **guanxi** is more than just a lunch shared with colleagues every couple of months. Developing these special working relationships takes time.

- In China **workers are expected to socialise with their colleagues and bosses**, and furthermore, they are expected to become friends with them. This concept is quite foreign to Westerners who often prefer to keep their distance in working relationships.
- In China **hiring decisions are typically made far more on the basis of a person's likeability** and ability to get on well with employers.





## A different pace in the workplace



- In China, business relations put an emphasis on patience. Compared to Europe and the USA, where corporate environments are often fast-paced and stressful, you can expect the pace of office life in China to be a little more relaxed.



This slower pace of life in Chinese offices also allows for the development of **guanxi**, these intricate personal relationships,.



## How to build working relationships in China

- However, although the pace of life in Chinese offices might be a little more relaxed, that doesn't mean there aren't any rules. Check out the guidelines for office relationships and **guanxi** below:

- Building business relationships takes time. **Don't try to rush things**, this will not be appreciated.
- It's best to **avoid emails and telephone calls when possible**. In China, **face-to-face meetings** are preferable.
- No matter the interaction, it is still important to **be aware of rank at all times**. Respect your superiors and keep rank differences in mind, **even while waiting in line at the coffee machine**.
- There is **a definite line drawn between business and socialising in China**. If you are out for dinner with colleagues **at a social event, it would be inappropriate to bring up work**.



## What is *guanxi*?



- Remember! **Guanxi** are built after a person has got to know you, so it's important to place emphasis on social occasions (and at all costs to avoid discussing work at these social occasions).



A good way to get to know colleagues is to find out about their interests and ask questions about them.



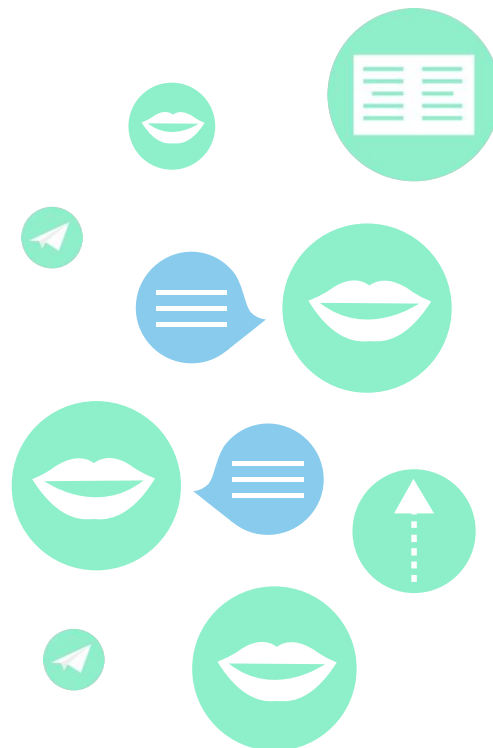
## Introducing yourself and talking about your personal life

**In China, it's important to build personal connections with colleagues and business associates. Think about meeting people for the first time: how would you introduce yourself? Remember that while it's important to get to know people on a personal level in China, it's also important not to offend. What kind of things would you avoid mentioning in introductions?**

“

Hi, my name is Catherine. I am the manager of the HR department at the company. In my spare time I enjoy playing with my young children, doing yoga and swimming, and going to the theatre. What about you?

”





## Vocabulary in context

**Look at the phrases below.  
In what context could you use each one?**

You obviously  
take a keen  
interest in tennis.

Do you enjoy  
reading?

What do you  
think about a  
team dinner on  
Tuesday?

This sauce is  
delicious, is it  
traditional for the  
region?

Have you ever  
visited the UK  
before?

Have you ever  
been to that art  
gallery before?

Could you  
recommend any  
good restaurants  
in the area?

What would you  
recommend  
doing in the city?

What will the  
climate be like  
in that region?

How do you find  
the facilities at  
the gym?

This is such a  
beautiful  
venue.

How do you like  
the company?



## Getting to know people

**You are on a business trip to China. Imagine you and your Chinese colleagues in each of the photos below, what kind of things could you talk about in each situation? Remember that in Chinese culture, talking about business during social occasions is frowned upon!**



socialising



getting to know  
you





## Behaviour and communication in China

- There are some key rules to follow when conducting business in China:

- **Always be on time**; arriving late may be viewed as offensive in China.
- **Never point** when speaking.
- If you need to point at something **use an open palm**, not your index finger.
- Avoid **all personal physical contact** with colleagues.
- **Avoid using large hand movements** in China.







## Behaviour and communication in China



- Even if it's playfully meant, insults should always be avoided in China as they may be taken the wrong way and offend someone.



Also, when it comes to blame and criticism, this should never be given in public as it is considered to disrupt group harmony, which is a priority over what is right or wrong.



## How to communicate



- Below are some more important rules for how to communicate in a business setting in China without causing offence.

- Do not shake hands unless someone first offers you their hand. Bowing or nodding is a more common greeting.
- Staring at someone is considered very rude.
- When being introduced, or when introducing someone, remember that introductions are always done in a formal manner. Use someone's full name and title when introducing people.



## Contrasts and cultural differences

Think about what you have learnt so far about Chinese company culture. In what ways is corporate culture in China different to that in your home country? What other business cultures have you experience working in and how do they differ too?





## Oops!

**Read the extract below about a business trip to China. What things did this person do wrong in terms of the do's and don'ts of Chinese business culture? Now imagine yourself in their shoes, can you role play the same situation with your teacher but this time behave more appropriately?**

I had a business meeting in Beijing yesterday, but I wanted a coffee before it started so I arrived ten minutes late. The view from the office was great, I tapped my colleague on the back and pointed out the skyscrapers. I tried to shake the hands of my Chinese colleagues and introduced myself by name but they didn't seem to understand what I was doing. One of them had a very bright tie, I couldn't stop staring at it!





## Business dress in China

- In China business dress is formal, not showy, and unpretentious.



For women it is best to stick to flat shoes and clothes that are not too revealing; for both men and women, bright colours should be avoided. For men, darker business suits and ties are the most acceptable attire.



## Away from the office



- Chinese cuisine is very different to western style cooking. Prepare your taste buds for a treat!



Rice, noodles and tofu are staple foods in China.



## Food and drink

**Chinese cuisine is delicious! Check your knowledge of the words below, can you make a sentence with each? Then imagine you are eating in a restaurant with Chinese colleagues, how would you compliment the meal?**



tasty

spicy

sour

delicious

sweet

bitter

allergic to

vegetarian

fried



## Test your knowledge

**Your colleague is making their first ever business trip to China, but they know nothing about the country or the culture. Your manager has asked you to brief them since you recently took a trip there. Try to summarise what you have learnt in this lesson for your colleague. There are some hints on important topics on the cards below.**

guanxi

culture

do's and don'ts

country facts





## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!







## Evaluation activity

**How did you find this class? Which parts of the lesson did you find most challenging? Which were most useful? Which were not so relevant? Give your feedback here!**





## Writing activity

**Several members of your team are shortly going to be visiting China on a business trip. They have never visited the country before and your manager has asked if you can write a short guide for their trip for them. Include facts about China and a brief guide to company culture and etiquette.**

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