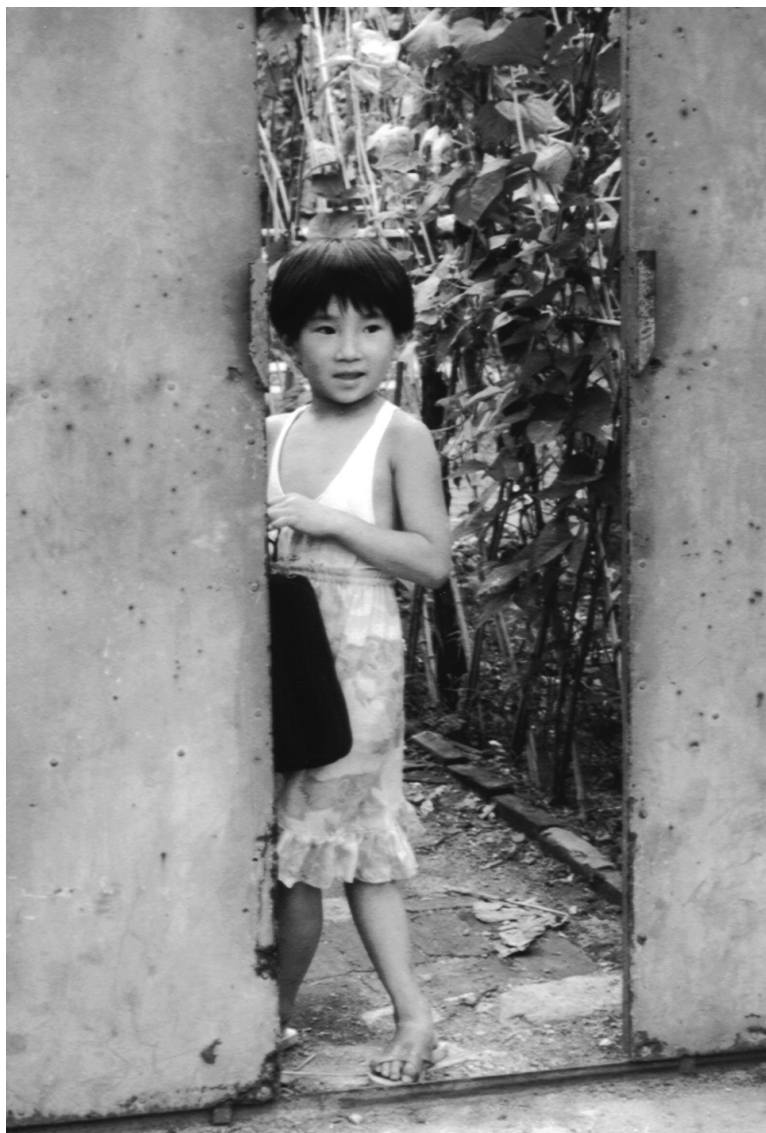


AN INTRODUCTION TO



THE MAINLAND CHINESE SOUL

An Introduction to the Mainland Chinese Soul



© 2001

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOUL OF THE MAINLAND CHINESE

If you were Chinese, what would be the cry of your heart? What would you long for? In 1979, a pop song captured the national spirit of many Chinese—so much so it still receives airplay today. “*Seed of the Dragon*” reverberates with emotion for the Motherland. Children of the mythical Yellow Emperor dream of China’s great symbolic rivers. As vanquished Dragon seed, as a long-suffering nation-family, they long to rise again.

*In the far-off East flows a river called the Yangtze.
In the far-off East flows the Yellow River, too.
I’ve never seen the beauty of the Yangtze,
Though often have I sailed it in my dreams.
And while I’ve never heard the roar of the Yellow River,
It pounds against its shores in my dreams.*

*In the ancient East there is a dragon; China is its name.
In the ancient East there lives a people, Heirs of the dragon
every one.
Under the claws of this mighty dragon I grew up
And its heir I have become.
Like it or not – Once and forever, an heir of the dragon*

*It was a hundred years ago on a quiet night,
The deep dark night before the great changes,
A quiet night shattered by gunfire,
Enemies on all sides, the sword of the dictator.
For how many years did those gunshots resound?
How many years and how many years more?
Mighty dragon, open your eyes
For now and evermore, open your eyes.*

Hou Dejian

An Introduction

It has become an over-worn cliché to describe the Chinese as “inscrutable.” Such a comment often comes when foreigners try unsuccessfully to deal with the very different orientation of the Chinese. It often comes from not looking deeply into their vast heritage and complex mentality to appreciate the uniqueness of the Chinese in the global setting. Most of us who deal with China feel like we are swimming on the surface of a vast sea, vaguely familiar with the surface waters and too overwhelmed with its scope and magnitude to contemplate the depths below.

☯ *What is this booklet about?*

This booklet has a straightforward goal. It is written to serve as an introduction to Chinese life in a way that reveals the underlying soul of the culture. Such a goal comes acknowledging that this can only be a simplistic summary. Though our efforts may not be universally accurate or exhaustive, we hope that these pages will serve as a springboard for further investigation and understanding, a springboard to take you beneath the surface waters. Our desire is that this material will help you move forward as you communicate with, enjoy, and develop a heart for the Chinese people.

“A GOOD
BEGINNING
IS HALF THE
JOURNEY”

The focus of this booklet is the Mainland Chinese people. Generalizing about the diversity of nearly 1.3 billion people scattered across widely different geographical contexts with multiple languages and varied personal histories is a task with great limitations. This material does not describe any one Chinese person – or all Chinese. It only intends to capture some of the general soul-oriented insights that may impact how we relate to or communicate with Chinese. We believe, as do most Chinese, that it is possible to make some generalizations and hope that these will be helpful for ministering among them. This is not intended to be a final word, simply a beginning.

☉ *What is meant by “soul”?*

Many excellent works give a thorough analysis of the historical, social and cultural heritage of the Chinese. They are invaluable in providing an understanding of the Chinese context. This booklet will not try to duplicate such resources, but compliment them by summarizing those points that seem to most effect the Chinese psyche, the Chinese heart. We assume that readers of this booklet are primarily motivated by how to relate in affirming ways so that the life of Christ can influence Chinese lives. So these pages will focus on dimensions related to the soul - the inner aspirations and goals of this people, their longings and felt needs.

Interwoven with the text are a number of vignettes – stories narrated by Chinese people. Each of these is a composite, based on real people that the authors know, and edited to illustrate the heart themes they have shared with us. We believe you will meet many Chinese in some ways similar to those here.

☉ *Who is this booklet for?*

This orientation to how the Chinese think and view life is for anyone interested in this people. If you are preparing for your first trip to the Mainland or hoping to meet Chinese students on your campus, this could give a good overview of what to expect when you encounter them. If you have lived in China for a while or have a Chinese friend in your own country, these pages will hopefully affirm some of what you have observed and deepen your insights into how Chinese feel and behave. If you are burdened to pray for the Chinese, this booklet may highlight some deeper needs for your intercession.

This booklet is meant to be a starting point toward a clearer and more compassionate understanding of this people. If stereotypes or rash conclusions result, then the material has been misused. This has been humbly written to outline some insights into the Chinese heart - insights that hopefully allow foreigners like us to become understanding friends of the people we meet and serve in Jesus' name.

🕒 *How was this booklet written?*

The compilation of the booklet has been an ongoing team effort. It began in the mid-1990s with an in-depth research project carried out by an outside specialist in several key Chinese cities. Sample groups across the spectrum of age, gender, educational and economic levels were asked to describe themselves - their context, their lives, their hopes and fears and their view of God. This information provided an initial "cultural translation" of issues related to the soul.

“A JOURNEY
OF 1000 MILES
BEGINS WITH
THE FIRST
STEP.”

Based on that input, another team gathered written and verbal feedback on related questions at several other locations in Mainland China. Several hundred Chinese from coastal and inland, northern and southern cities gave additional feedback. This information was shaped into a working draft.

A number of foreigners with extensive experience in China were then extensively interviewed or asked to comment on the draft. A group worked to integrate the suggestions and rewrite them into a working document, which was then circulated for corrective input and revisions. Each of the main points was also compared to established contemporary and historical works.

Finally, a team of writers and China experts wove this all together into this present form. They also linked key thoughts to popular Chinese sayings (which you'll find in the sidebars) and photos to illustrate the key ideas.

We believe this process has highlighted some significant heart orientations of Mainland Chinese. And we hope you will find it helpful as you relate to this people, people like Ren Min.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MAINLAND CHINESE SOUL

Ren Min's Story – A Chinese Journey
Rural Liaoning Province
2001 – The Year of the Snake

My family name is Ren. When I was born in 1985, my father named me Min, meaning "citizen, one of the people." I was born in a small, poor town in Northeastern China. Here the Manchu established the Qing Dynasty, the last of China's great imperial dynasties. After the fall of the Qing in 1911, my homeland was contested by warlords usurping power from Sun Yat-sen's Republic. After that, Western missionaries and business adventurers tramped through our province to pursue their interests. Then Japan moved in and set up its own Puppet State as an industrial base for its militaristic expansion. My recent ancestors resented and distrusted all foreign encroachment and longed again for the glorious days of stable central rule under strong and wise Chinese leaders.

My grandfather had no childhood. Born in 1930, his family suffered and nearly starved after the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931. Granddad spent the rest of his school days laboring in the unproductive dirt or surreptitiously meeting with the young communists. Several times he helped carry out sabotages against the Japanese, and when they finally withdrew after WWII, he marched under Mao Zedong and Marshall Zhu De to drive out the Western-backed Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. He willingly poured all his sweat, blood and youth to fight to regain China for the Chinese. When Mao declared the founding of the People's Republic, my grandfather had an important role in our county to overthrow the bloated landlords and distribute small-tracts of land to other peasants like himself.

My dad was born in 1957 as Mao launched his ill-fated Great Leap Forward. While grandpa organized the peasants to cut down trees to fuel the iron kettles, grandma gathered every piece of old iron to smelt. The land was largely unattended

in the local industrialization fervor, and dad nearly died from malnutrition during the terrible famines that swept the country from 1960 to 62. Just as he started attending school and got his red Young Pioneers scarf, the Red Guards arrived, humiliated his teachers, closed the school and sent him back to the fields. He lost his childhood. But he mourned the deaths of Mao and Zhou Enlai in 1976 and worried what would become of the country.

My mom was a disillusioned peasant revolutionary and met dad at a school meeting in 1976. Both had sacrificed so much study time for the many political movements that they could not pass the entrance exams. My dad married her in 1978, just as Deng Xiaoping was coming to power. He and my mom dutifully labored hard on their communal plot, but my dad taught himself how to put up electric wires to help contribute to Deng's Four Modernizations. Both party members, my parents supported all the anti-Westernization campaigns of the 80s, though with less and less enthusiasm. But my dad kept up his public responsibilities well enough to be honored as a model worker and was given a responsible position in the local party leadership. I grew up proud of my dad, who though an uneducated peasant, had stubborn persistence, aching self-sacrifice and strong social responsibility – a new man in the New China.

As a child I was mainly interested in finding out about the world around me. I wanted to go beyond our poor village, to travel more than the 3-5 kilometers I walked barefoot as a little boy, to see what the big, fire-belching steel works nearby were really like, to know more about the rest of China and the outside world. Luckily for me and my generation of only-children, China's Open Door policy started bringing new information and new opportunities by the 90s.

The only way to go beyond that backward village was to achieve at school. So I gave all my energy and attention to studying, becoming a fierce competitor to avoid having to hoe the fields. I used the money my mom gave me from selling crude popsicles and from my dad's electrical stall to buy books. Together, they barely made \$100 USD a month. On the long walk to school each day, while eating rough mashed

corncakes and leeks, I memorized Tang Dynasty poems and recited mathematics problems.

I became the best student in our poor village school and won the chance to go to the middle school in the next town at 13. In 1998, I moved into the dorm there with 8 other peasant boarders. Even though conditions in China were improving, the rooms were very spartan – a row of desks down the middle and two rows of bunk beds on the side with our few possessions stuffed under our beds. But as we crammed for our



exams, we found simple ways to enjoy life: playing cards, strumming local and foreign pop songs on a borrowed guitar, listening to the radio, especially to foreign English broadcasts, and watching local and Hollywood movies.

The secondary school entrance examinations were last month and I ranked number 30 out of 3,200 in the whole county! That score and my dad's good connections should guarantee me a place in our county's key high school, which is essential toward getting into a decent university three years from now. China is changing rapidly, and I want to do even more for my country than my father. The economic reforms are transforming big cities like Shenyang and Dalian, but I want to get a good enough education to help bring more of those changes to poor villages like ours. Maybe I can even succeed in going abroad for a few years to bring advanced technology back to China.

It might be hard for foreigners to understand us, but we are proud of our country, our great history and our recent progress – I believe we Chinese have a great future. Hopefully people like me can help make our Motherland great again! Mainly, I hope I can make enough money to make life easier for my parents and myself, especially when the burden is on me to support them in their old age. What we mostly want is peace and material security.

Where do we begin as we think about ministering in the Chinese culture?

☉ *Chinese Begin with the Past*

The Chinese have a saying, “*Looking backward to go forward.*” For us from westernized, future-oriented societies, looking back seems unusual. The concept of a 5000-year-old culture is simply beyond our reach. But a contemporary Chinese philosopher argues, “China is a massive thing, still hidden in the mists...To understand China, you must come to grips with the tradition.”

That tradition is rich in discoveries, beliefs and wisdom. Since the time that Confucius looked back to previous dynasties for insights, Chinese believe that the past is a reliable reference for how to live in an uncertain present or even more uncertain future. China has a great record of men and women who are worthy models. There is a rich heritage of philosophical thought, beautiful literature and wise sayings that under-gird today’s beliefs, motivations and behaviors. To understand the soul of current Mainland Chinese, we must understand a few points from the past.

☉ *China has a Glorious Cultural Past*

Chinese are enmeshed in their history. As they walk the downtown streets of Xian, the early national capital established around 200 BC, they are surrounded by the stone city wall standing 40 feet tall and 30 feet wide with a 6 mile perimeter. Outside the city are the Terracotta Warriors, truly one of the great archeological finds of the century, still guarding the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi (the first “Chin” Emperor) who first ruled and unified the great territory that we now call China.

There are scores of great achievements in Chinese history. We marvel at the civilization of ancient dynasties like the Han, the crowning literary, artistic, and political achievements of the Tang, or the later Ming and Qing dynasties. We are awed by the incredible legacy of bronzes, paintings, pottery, sculptures and other fine craftsmanship. We gasp at the great works of architecture like the Great Wall and the inventions of gunpowder, paper



money, moveable typesetting and the compass, each used far earlier than in the West. All these remind us and today’s Chinese that this was once the undisputed Middle Kingdom – a great cradle of world civilization and national pride.

☉ *China is Burdened by Its Recent History*

However, the past 150 years have been less than glorious. Unjust wars of aggression by Western powers, unfair treaty agreements and unsettling internal conflict have tarnished the Chinese image before the nations. China plunged from a pinnacle of power in 1800 to an object for international ravaging after the Opium Wars just 50 years later.

The past 150 years has seen widespread death, destruction and disillusionment. Far more people died (some estimate over 30 million) during the 1850-64 Taiping Rebellion than in the American Civil War. Over 20 million Chinese lost their lives during “the Chinese Holocaust,” the decade of Japanese aggression in World War II. Millions died during the Nationalist-Communist Civil War that followed, leading up to “Liberation” in 1949. Approximately 30 million perished in the agricultural disasters in the years following the 1957 Great Leap Forward. And millions more died during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, not to mention all who were driven to abject poverty or bare survival during these great cataclysms. Droughts, floods, earthquakes or man-made disasters have hit few countries as hard or as consistently this last century.

The rest of the world moved forward in technology and prosperity while China seemed locked in its feudal past. Chairman Mao’s efforts to change that legacy resulted in some great successes, but also some tragic failures. Today’s Chinese carry a great burden of history on their shoulders. Since Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, they have again willingly sacrificed and been striving to advance China’s prestige and position in the world community.

☉ *China is a Populous Country with Limited Resources*

Though Chinese history is crowned with many achievements, few of China’s many people have actually benefited from them. China has always been a highly populated, hierarchical society. Only the very few who could afford a rigorous education had any hope of passing through the strenuous examination system to positions of power and affluence. While that small privileged percentage enjoyed China’s civilized luxuries, most of the country waded through the mire of paddy fields, shouldered

their loads and poured out their blood, sweat and tears to create the transportation and architectural achievements at which we now marvel.

China is at its core a land of peasant farmers, a land of poor suffering coolies (“bitter laborers”) expending all their efforts just to survive the wrath of nature, the devastation of war, the imbalances of wealth, and the injustices of authoritarianism. Mao idealized the peasant and the laborer in his revolution and encouraged large families. That swelled the population from 400 million in 1949 to over 1 billion in 1979! Deng, ever the pragmatist, sought to correct this measure with his one-child policy. China now has 348 million households, each with an average of 3.44 people. The 2000 census estimates that growth has slowed to its current level under 1.3 billion, but still with 64% in rural areas.

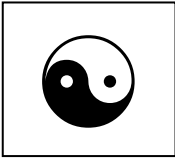
As China now pushes toward economic liberalization, the great challenge continues to be the countryside, the inland provinces, the peasants and the poor. With over 20% of the world’s population, China has less than 7% of the world’s arable land! Much of that land is carved out of mountain slopes. And distributing agricultural or industrial products across China’s labyrinth of peaks, gorges and deserts poses incredible challenges.

For the first time in China’s 5000 years of history, this government can make the amazing claim that they have largely solved the problems of food and shelter for the entire population. But they acknowledge that it may be decades before the new wealth of China’s coastal areas begins to transform poor rural life in inland China at significant levels. The 2000 Census shows that average per capita annual disposable city incomes reached \$759, while the annual rural average is only \$272 (can you imagine living on \$22 a month?!)!

☯ *China Engenders Paradoxes and Contradictions*

As peasant laborers lived between power and poverty, droughts and floods, heat and cold, they early gravitated to an abiding belief in *Yin* and *Yang*. This circular Taoist symbol somehow gives an assurance that there is a tenable balance between the

bright, powerful, active (*yang*) forces in the cosmos and the dark, weak, passive (*yin*) forces.



This binary, dichotomous balance of contradictions is expressed throughout Chinese traditions. The 5th century BC Taoist classic “The Way of Virtue” illustrated many enigmatic paradoxes. Traditional Chinese medicine is based on a system of opposing balances, designating foods or medicines that “heat” the body to balanced those that “cool” it. Mao built his whole political philosophy around contradictions. And now, whenever Chinese are caught in one of their frequent quagmires of deciding between competing rights and wrongs, they acknowledge again that life is one of contradictions that will somehow find a *yin/yang* balance.

This paradigm also supports a pluralism of beliefs and values. Chinese have an ability to accept and embrace multiple realities. Categories that Westerners would segment into incompatible opposites may not be mutually exclusive to Chinese. Embracing one ideal does not dictate denying another—each is allowed to have its own merits, no matter how ambiguous or overlapping it may seem to outsiders.

How has this historical context affected the Chinese?

☯ *China is a Resilient Culture*

When Chinese look back on the hardships in their history, they often liken themselves to bamboo. The winds may blow strong to bend them, but they will not break. There exists a deep sense of determination in the Chinese people. “We may have been pushed down for some time, but this nation will again rise.”

No matter what political crisis CNN may have focused on, Chinese stick to being practical. Economic reform is now universally endorsed as the only road that will improve Chinese lives. The last 20 years have ushered in incredible economic growth – China has averaged an amazing 10-15 percent increase per year. Foreign trade rose from \$117 billion in 1990 to \$474 billion in 2000! In the last decade most of the populace have

been provided for, many have finally begun to taste progress and nearly all have gained confidence that China can reenter the technological global economy.

Still much must be done to develop such a large land area and to meet the needs of an even larger population. As the centrally planned system undergoes reform, many are falling through the



cracks. Though 807 million still live in rural areas, the power base is in the hands of only a few urbanites. According to the 2000 Census, 456 million people now live in cities, roughly 35 % of the population (almost a 10% increase in the last 10 years)! Several industrial cities already have unofficial lay-off rates nearing 40% and China's entrance into the WTO may force more unemployment. A few high-fliers may profit, but most people are left in a position of "eating bitterness" – a Chinese phrase that denotes the unfair burdens of daily life in a land of limited opportunities, resources and relief.

But China remains self-assured of its destined place. She will not be ignored. She feels due more respect on the international scene and wonders why a rapidly developing civilization that is home to over 20 percent of the world isn't respected more already. For Chinese, history is cyclical. In time, all things should return to their proper place and China hopes to again

become the “Middle Kingdom,” at least with a leading role in Asia.

Chinese are also patient. It took some 100 years to get Hong Kong and Macau back, but they succeeded. China can be expected to be persistently resolute in working toward reunification with Taiwan. All Chinese eagerly wait for the day when national sovereignty and the historic sense of internal integrity are re-established.

☉ *China is an Authoritarian Culture*

Every Chinese government since Emperor Qin conceived of its role in a very hierarchical, heavy-handed, top-down way. Mao’s Communist Government sought to win more favor with the peasants, but with a similar authoritarian style. Called a “dictatorship of the proletariat”, the Party was to take the lead in initiating and enforcing revolution. Mao and the Party launched mass movement after mass movement to usher in dramatic changes. Some pushed the country forward and some dragged it back, like the notorious Red Guard movement in 1966 that sparked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

National campaigns have continued under Deng and now Jiang Zemin. In every campaign, there hovers a paradoxical balance between building national unity and maintaining Party security. This tottering between caring for the masses and controlling them is a bitter-sweet reality that the populace must, and usually does, accept.

Though on the economic front, China is “open for business” and business seems to be given freer reign, social control has remained tight. Political dissent of any form is not tolerated. A key part of educational reform includes stepping up political instruction and finding new ways to make the Party attractive. Though espousing “freedom of belief,” there is a prohibition against propagation. Religions are closely monitored and regularly clamped down on to guarantee that they serve the State’s social goals.



Unobservable in the new office skyscrapers or high-class hotels is a grass-roots police and party apparatus that ensures both public security and scrutiny. Chinese in general accept this and have a fairly positive view of the police and the military as ordering elements in society. They believe in human rights, but construe them as that which is good for the most people in society – as national rights, a right to public order and a right to make money. National newspapers regularly remind citizens of how many times individualist anarchy nearly destroyed China,

like during the 1850's Taiping Rebellion or 1930's warlord period. Most Chinese would rather sacrifice some personal privileges to ensure that the nation stays stable and unified for the common good.

“WHEN
EVERYONE
GATHERS
FIREWOOD,
THE BLAZE IS
GREAT.”

☉ *China is a Mass Culture*

Since the Qin dynasty began the imperial system in 214 BC, each government tried to broadly propagate its programs with the goal of penetrating the whole country. The examination and Mandarin bureaucratic system were attempts to disseminate imperial rule to the masses. Perhaps Mao and the Party can be credited with finally succeeding in implementing a true mass line. The policies of the last 50 years have reached all Chinese, have finally succeeded in unifying most of China and have imposed a deeper level of national identity than ever before in history.

“THINK
THRICE
BEFORE
ACTING.”

The Chinese stress conformity. This training to fit in begins at home and is firmly established in the school system. It seems inconceivable that a child would behave differently from what is expected of them. Children are under a great cultural weight to learn what they should do. Even if they inwardly think otherwise, they try to conform their behavior and answers to the conservative social expectations of what is proper.

Chinese media, political, social and educational structures all support this theme of orthodoxy in ideology and belief. This weight is transferred from one generation to the next with amazing continuity. The background research project for this booklet found an unusual comparison to the other countries studied. Chinese were, regardless of age, gender or location, unparalleled in their uniform responses to what they thought about and wanted in life. Newcomers will find a striking degree of uniformity in what Mainland Chinese agree is “true,” whether it is orthodox opinions about ethnic stereotypes, science, medical reforms, or current events.

☉ *China is an Insider Culture*

Whether due to limited resources, interpretations of Confucianism, or other factors, Chinese have adopted a clear demarcation of what is inside and what is outside. This promotes a particularistic ethic. It is assumed that no one could have the resources or capacity to universally love or help others. So one applies his moral and relational energy to take care of his or her in-group. All others are outside and are handled differently or even indifferently.

We are well informed about Chinese modesty and politeness – qualities that are admirably exhibited in “inside” situations. But “outside” behavior, where one is just part of the anonymous crowd, can be rough and tumble, seemingly every man for himself. People will often hesitate to help someone “outside” in need because taking initiative might jeopardize the whole family’s resources. Most Chinese are aware of these inadequacies in public behavior, and the government has frequent campaigns to promote “civilized” acts like queuing, helping others, showing public kindness.

“A WORD
ONCE
SPOKEN
CANNOT BE
OVERTAKEN
EVEN BY A
TEAM OF
FOUR
HORSES.”

The inside world carries with it ideals of harmony and goodness. The outside world is assumed to be the source of conflict and evil. It is also considered a moral issue that internal matters be kept quiet and solved “at home.” It brings great embarrassment and resistance when outsiders meddle with internal affairs. It is assumed that outsiders can never fully understand inside conditions.

Even if a family (the main in-group) is experiencing troubles, people tend to report positively on life at home because it should be harmonious. Or they might blame the situation on outside factors – i.e. “father has a bad temper at home because he is under too much pressure at work.” On a larger level, if something is stolen in Shanghai, the insiders (Shanghainese) are convinced that outsiders (poor guest workers from the outlying provinces) did the act. Nationally, many new social problems are blamed on western influence. This is also true of personal problems—admitting an inside

inadequacy is personally uncomfortable or even shameful, so blame is usually directed at some outside cause.

☉ *China is a Relational Culture*
Personal “Guanxi” Networks

Insider thinking and the unique context of China strongly affects personal relationships. Westerners often value relationships that involve open verbal communication, interpersonal intimacy, and psychologically satisfying pair interaction. For most Chinese, “relational” means cultivating a network of primarily functional relationships.

Though there is an emotive element, it is usually internalized. Expressing feelings too openly could jeopardize someone’s face or group harmony. On the outside, emotions are held back and practical action is emphasized. The group, usually a family or a network of friends, provides a secure web of resources for survival, advancement and mutual support. Each person in the net is expected to sacrifice his own personal interests for the common good so that the in-group can move up the social hierarchy.

CHINESE DEPEND
ON “GUANXI” –
RELATIONSHIP
CONNECTIONS
OR LITERALLY “A
CLOSED SYSTEM,”
AN ESTABLISHED
NETWORK

Chinese society is built on this economy of relationships. With limited resources, each person carefully considers how to invest in obligatory relationships that might bring some future advantage. “*Guanxi*” is the word used to describe these relational connections, whether they include extended family, friends or other indebted associations. *Guanxi* is important in a highly restricted society where connections can help overcome the limitations. *Guanxi* is necessary whenever demand vastly exceeds supply.

When facing any kind of impossibility, the question is not primarily “What can you personally do?” but, “Who do you know? What kind of connections do you have?” Contrary to our “lone ranger” ideal or our individual “rags to riches” dreams, one cannot survive in China without key relationships. So pervasive is the *guanxi* concept that Chinese find it convenient to use their channels even for routine daily matters like getting tickets or making purchases.

Relationship Circles

Chinese keep their network of close relationships fairly small and private. The best relationships seem to be same sex relationships. Women in particular seem to be very satisfied with their closest relationships with other women, with their children or with the older generation. The mother-daughter tie is often very strong. But cross-sex relationships appear strained and in the current economic realities, many married couples seem to have settled for a somewhat unsatisfying, functional or even dysfunctional relationship.

Studies show that women cultivate a much smaller circle (maybe 2-3 close friends) than men do. Women tend to establish these selected close-knit relationships with one or two former classmates, a current work-mate or family member with which they communicate fairly openly. For both men and women, the secondary school or college exam prep years seem to be a time when friends bond together, and it is not uncommon for these relationships to continue throughout life.

Men often forge a “good old boy” type of network in which a small core (usually 3-5) of former classmates provides candid mutual advice, stimulus toward achievement (often through one-up-manship) and even financial support for each other’s ventures. For men, it is a great boon to curry favor with a well-positioned mentor to give supervision, help them forgo the pitfalls, and reduce the effort required to succeed. But gaining favor in such hierarchical relationships requires delicate skills in gift giving, giving and saving face and demonstrating loyalty -- skills Westerners often have little understanding of. Gaining this kind of well-placed support is for many Chinese men the key to their success.

“THREE
STINKING OLD
COBBLERS
WHO PUT
THEIR WITS
TOGETHER
CAN
OUTSMART
EVEN THE
GREATEST OF
MASTERMINDS.”



But the definition of success is now a moving target. For instance, the three needs in the 1960's of a bicycle, sewing machine, and radio became a TV, phone and refrigerator in the 80's and for 2000 have now become the three new needs of a car, apartment and DVD player. And as the government dismantles unprofitable state-run companies, men now lean even more heavily on their "guanxi" network. It is their friends that help them sort out both the ways to survive and the context in which they should try to succeed – in new conglomerates, private firms, multinationals, or by banding together with buddies or family members to try to launch out on their own. In times of economic transition like this, knowing who you can depend on is as important as ever.

“GOLD OR
SILVER
ABODES DO
NOT
COMPARE TO
ONE'S OWN
GRASS HUT.”

☉ *China is a Communal, Extended-Family Culture*

The core unit for personal stability has traditionally been the family or clan. The walls of the family compound have always provided safety, support and practical assistance for all aspects of life in Chinese society. Mao sought to dismantle the family and create new allegiances to the State through his commune system. He may have succeeded in replacing the clan, but most Chinese still treasure their extended network of family

relationships. The adage “*blood is thicker than water*” is believed and practiced. As the central system is under reform, relatives try to provide a reliable backbone of support and stable identity. This is being relational at a very practical level.

Current economic realities are putting new pressures on families. State downsizing means that more and more people are “temporarily” laid off and being paid a welfare salary of less than \$30 a month. Retirement officially begins at age 60 for men and 55 for women, but due to over-employment and inefficient or redundant industries, many men are being released at 55 and women at 50 or earlier with low pensions. To make ends meet many struggle to find work as night watchmen, fit-it men, small-shop assistants or whatever. But most are under-trained and do not have the connections to find jobs in the rapidly upgrading economy. Now, more than ever, college diplomas are needed to guarantee success. The 2000 census found that 3.6 % of the population now have a university education, a 154% increase since 1990! The increase is laudable, but the pressure to support a family member or become one of the few with a higher education is daunting.

These kinds of pressures have always forced families in China to be soberingly pragmatic. Opportunities are considered more for their overall family benefits than for their individual costs. Family togetherness often yields to family advancement. The family may have to endure separation for one member to grasp a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. If one needs to gain a degree or key chance in their career, then all must accept the accompanying burden, hoping that it brings a better future. Though past oriented, there is a very utilitarian view about doing whatever is necessary for the future, and much of that is vested in the child.

☉ *Chinese Culture Puts its Hope in its Children*

Chinese people love and value children. Chinese families traditionally had many children, preferably sons. Daughters had to be given away in marriage and cost a dowry. Sons were a family’s treasures either as laborers for the fields, or the hope for education and position. The shift from rural to urban development has brought a corresponding shift in attitudes toward girls. Many city parents now want daughters because

they respond more intimately, care for the parents better in old age, and often do better in school. If either a boy or girl succeeds in school, they have the potential to pull up the whole family's income and standing in society. The one-child policy has only increased this pressure on children.

Though Chinese are amazingly lenient and lovingly spoil small children, once school starts they are expected to honor the family with unabated effort. It is not uncommon for parents to dress and feed even ten-year old kids to help save time for exam preparation. Since the advent of having to pay school tuition in the late 90's, families now scramble and sacrifice great sums



to get their child in the best possible schools.

Starting in a reputable primary school helps a child test into one of the few key middle schools, and that increases the child's university entrance chances.

Since school success is the ticket to a better future, everyone pushes accordingly. More and more children are placed in boarding schools (nurseries, experimental kindergartens or expensive primary schools) while dads and moms devote longer working hours to pay tuition. It isn't just a matter of convenience – many parents believe their child gains more from professionals than from tired parents. Weekends for many end up being a parade of going from one tutorial or special training course to the next to give the child the best possible foundation in English, computers, mathematics, music or other specialties.

There are virtually no examples of “stay at home moms” – nearly every woman works. Women make up 46% of the Chinese work force (compared to the world average of 34.5%). More and more grandparents spend their retirements caring for their grandchild so parents can advance their careers or go overseas. Anything that opens a new door for the family is considered worth the sacrifice. Though nuclear family thinking is now becoming possible with the potential of purchasing new apartments, the whole family is still involved in major decisions and family advancement is still the dominant orientation.

☉ *China has been a Male-Dominated Culture*

Traditionally China has been a male-oriented society. It has been a land of the patriarchs where fathers ruled the home. Wives became part of their husband's family and were often required to serve their mothers-in-law, giving up all their rights in the interest of their new family.

Mao set out to liberate women. Mainly, he gave them the right to spend their day working at jobs like men. But their husbands have not necessarily given them the right to relax at night. Most of China continues to be somewhat chauvinistic and women still must hold up more than “half of the sky.”

However, many urban women are now breaking this mold. Even in traditional Chinese society, women often controlled family finances and household decisions. Some men joked that their outwardly docile wife was a tiger at home. Since women now have more earning power, many are placing higher financial and status demands on their husbands.

If a woman exceeds her husband's salary or position, she may look down on him, demand her way at home and might even find grounds for divorce. New financial goals, pressurized work, separated families and rapid social changes are all contributing to a great increase in and acceptance of extra-marital-affairs and divorce. Many women have become



noticeably louder, more aggressive, more career-minded and more focused on becoming one of the “big strong ladies” that are increasingly climbing to the top in Asian business. These tendencies add even greater tension to already troubled male-female relationships.

☪ *China is a Power and Submission-Oriented Culture*

The traditional concept of filial piety still persists. This unspoken contract stipulates that parents will sacrifice for and provide the child every security in exchange for the child's absolute obedience and submission to the parents. And the obligation extends beyond childhood to require grown children to give of their income and time to support and care for their aging parents. Arranged marriages are no longer the rule, but parents often play a role in approving potential marriage partners. Many new couples start their married life in their parents' homes and under their authority. Mothers-in-law still exert a great deal of authority over their son's wives.

Having endured authority at home, everyone seems to enjoy opportunities where others must submit to them. Bosses tend to be very demanding in business. Those with even a little seniority can be unreasonably domineering over their subordinates. Sales clerks often act as if they have power over the goods that the customer wants to buy. And in any work unit, whoever has been allocated a key has power over all who hope to enter that domain. People pay close attention to whether they have a superior edge over another in something. In a historically arbitrary land, there appears to be an intense longing to finally have some degree of control.

With today's one-child policy, children are being empowered. Four grandparents and two parents share the roles of raising only one child. The vanguards of this group of "little emperors" are now college age. Their "me generation" mentality coupled with unparalleled international exposure will potentially bring great shifts to traditional Chinese values. The social and personal impact they will have on the traditional fabric of Chinese culture is still to be seen.

How do the Chinese view the future?

☯ *China is a Changing Culture*

Tremendous change is occurring each day in China. *"Whatever you say of China is true of one place at one time, and probably not true somewhere else."* There is a growing gap between life in the cities and the poor rural villages. Coastal areas are developing at break-neck speeds and integrating with the global economy while central and western China are just starting to awaken to the possibility of change. The new single-child generation is wantonly exposing itself to all that is new, techno and western, while their parents, "the lost generation" of the Cultural revolution are being laid off in record numbers and their grandparents are overwhelmed by the disorienting changes. The income gap between the rich and the poor is becoming alarmingly great. Traditional values and ideology are giving way to consumerism, materialism and even expressions

of individualism. The homogeneity of the country is starting to yield to radically new diversities.

Shanghai may be one of the most amazing examples of change. Since 1992, this old metropolis has become a world class exhibit of progress. A literal visual transformation has swept the horizon - 3000 skyscrapers built in six years! The world's tallest hotel and Pearl of the Orient (Asia's tallest communication tower) now make up the new high rise, high tech skyline. Expressways, subways, cellular phone communications, ISDN and ASDL Internet connections are now commonplace parts of the



infrastructure. Shanghai's progress is now influencing the entire Yangtze River Delta, which now produces nearly one-third of China's Gross Domestic Product annually. That in turn is slowly impacting the hinterlands. China, in part, is a rapidly

developing nation. As guests, we will have to be aware of and sensitive to the growing discrepancies.

What are the longings of Chinese today?

All Chinese would like a piece of the new economic pie, but most are absorbed in the everyday necessities of life. With the dismantling of the state “iron rice bowl” work unit system, the future is an uncertain one and the needs of today are present and pressing. Rising tuition fees, new medical costs, big lags in pensions and social security, the need to now rent or buy an apartment instead of having one appropriated by the company ...the list of major changes is staggering. Speculating about the future is not a primary pastime of the average Chinese. Now,



surviving life is. Though many feel that they are drowning in daily challenges, their hearts are still filled with longings.

Perhaps the greatest hope for most is to somehow improve their condition in life. This hope has a number of expressions. Most Chinese sense they would be satisfied by things like: restored national respect in the global community, family harmony and prosperity, a personal sense of success, and the time and means

to enjoy those things which give peace and satisfaction to replace the emptiness of striving.

☉ *A Longing for National Restoration*

To consider Chinese nationalistic might be overstating the fact. But an unusually strong racial identity (“We Chinese”) and commitment to the motherland drives a deep-seated desire to see past wrongs rectified and the disgraces of China’s recent history absolved. The words of *“Seed of the Dragon”* (see introduction) still stir their hearts. Most Chinese just want their people and their country to be respected. Many are embarrassed about the low economic and educational level of much of the country and desperately want to see it developed.

Chinese may themselves be quite critical of their past and their country (because they love it, they have ideas about how to improve it), but if a foreigner becomes critical, he or she may find a sudden defensiveness. It may surprise us when Chinese suddenly become sensitive about issues where national face or prestige is deemed to be at stake, like a national team’s loss in an international sporting event, entrance into the WTO, China’s vote in the UN or an Olympic bid. Each of these events represents more than what we see on the surface – each symbolizes a people’s century long quest to once more be treated like an equal in the community of nations. And no matter how we try to understand this quest, their Chinese upbringing has convinced them that outsiders can never quite understand Chinese ways.

☉ *A Longing for Family Harmony and Prosperity*

In a family-based society, it comes as no surprise that each person dreams that his or her family will somehow be able to taste the sweetness of success. Each strives against the odds to somehow bring more peace and stability to the home. Each tries to submit his or her own will to the collective will of the family to live in harmony with one another, though the tensions of modern life and cramped spaces make this more and more difficult. Together they realize that satisfaction will finally come when all their striving and sacrifice has paid off; when parents are able to finally enjoy their retirement days; when the only-child has had the best tutors and schools and has gotten into a

name university; and when everyone in the family is living at a higher standard of living with fewer worries.

☉ *A Longing for Improved Chances and Personal Success*

Opportunity seldom knocks at the door in China. So each hopes that fate is with him to give him or her good luck. Though hard work is the norm, each hopes that the lines of his hand foretell a good fortune, that the recent stock purchase will turn into a windfall, that a joss stick prayer at a temple really will turn their fortunes, or that some unexpected meeting will prove to be destiny. For some, going abroad is seen as the best opportunity, as the lucky ticket to a good life and perfect future.

When someone else achieves something, most admire his or her good luck and wish they had more themselves. It is doubtful if anyone in China can make it to the top by sheer hard work and

CHINESE FEAR
THE SAYING
“TO HAVE
GIVEN
EVERYTHING,
BUT ACHIEVED
NOTHING.”

inspiration like people think they can in some countries. Most hope for some lucky wind or auspicious opportunity to be able to break out of the mundane cycle of life. Most are willing to take even questionable risks to not let such a chance go by. Whatever they pursue, most Chinese believe they need the power that money, position or opportunity gives to finally attain peace.

☉ *A Longing for Inner Satisfaction and Perfect Peace*

Look at any piece of Chinese art and one will see a very different ideal than the crass realities of daily life. Most Chinese hold a deep appreciation for beauty and space, a longing for a romantic ideal, though they may never experience it. The world is tainted with hustle and bustle but traditional Chinese paintings portray open white spaces and peaceful scenes. For Chinese there is a solace in emptiness and abstraction quite different from Western Art.

The spaces in art or calligraphy can be filled with one's own fantasy ideals. A lone Taoist monk stands dwarfed by the majestic beauty around him. The revered lines of poetry of Li Bai, Wang Wei and Du Fu conjure up vacant, contemplative images. The great classics of Chinese fiction describe the god-like

wisdom of China's heroes, secluded pavilions and courtyards, the beauties of women and paradise – all attempts at perfection. Parks try to create an idealized world in one corner with mock mountains, flowing streams, winding paths and secluded corners.

Ascending a Tower at a Town in Hebei

*A small village upon the Fu cliff,
Traveler's retreat among the misty clouds.
High town to view the sunset.
Distant water's reach reflects misty-green hills.
Lights on the shores, lonely boats to anchor.
Vast loneliness, heaven and earth filled dusk,
Man and broad river at leisure.*

Wang Wei

To attain this perfect ideal, Taoists tried to illustrate how non-action led to the Way. Confucius taught cultivating virtue as the way to moral perfection. Buddhists retreated to monasteries to practice physical discipline, mental purity and good works. Ask most Chinese what they admire about religions and they'll tell you of the good moral qualities, the sense of peace and detachment from the world. At the deepest level, the Chinese soul, like everyone's, longs for rest and repose to quench the gnawing meaninglessness and emptiness of the material world.

So what realities do today's Chinese face?

What do Chinese encounter on a daily basis? What concerns many of them? What are they confronted with as they try to make sense of life? Let's now look at life's complexities for a rather typical young Chinese couple. Meet the Chen's.

Beijing in 2000 AD – the Year of the Dragon

My name is Chen. I'm 28. I graduated from one of China's "well-known" universities and have worked for five years in a "famous" state owned company. My father knew a vice-director there who helped me get the position. I've worked hard in my job, have been loyal to my leaders, have done important Party work for the company, have had several promotions and now have a respectable position. My monthly salary is now about 3500 RMB (\$420 US), which is fairly good. My parents both live in Beijing and are proud of the achievements of their only son. Their future seems quite secure now that their son has such a stable position.

Last year I got married. Lin and I met through the introduction of friends. I was very attracted to her personality and ability. She also graduated from a good university and has a good position. We knew each other for about 3 years, gradually fell in love and married. My parents' agreed she was a good match.

However she's not from Beijing, but from Anhui, where her parents are poor farmers. They grow cotton and wheat and managed to sacrifice much to help Lin get a good education. But in recent years, floods destroyed their crops and the market for cotton is low. They had an older child, but he died during the hard times of the Cultural Revolution. As their only child now, Lin needs to send quite a bit of her salary to help support her parents, especially now that they are aging. We also go see them every year for a week at Spring Festival.

Our first year of marriage has gone all right, but it has been strained some due to our living situation. My work unit provided housing in the company dormitory for single men. But when we married, we could not live there, so we moved in with my parents. They wanted us to live with them. Their small two-room apartment is one hour by bus to my unit and nearly 45 minutes to Lin's. It's not the most convenient, but it is workable.

My mother had high expectations of her daughter-in-law, so when Lin comes back from work exhausted, she still has to help my mother cook, wash the laundry and do other chores. We both want to share the housework equally, but this last year my company sent me all over China on business trips, so I was not often home to help out. Once when I was home, and after my parents went to bed, Lin quietly cried about her burden or whispered to me about her anger over my mother's domination. My father has been bothered by the tension between them and recently lost his temper. He tried to persuade my mother to be more reasonable. This added stress to their relationship. I don't know how we can start a family in such a tense situation!

In the last year, my work environment has become very complicated. Mr. Zhou is 32 and graduated from a more famous university than I did. But I have now been



promoted above him. He has very good connections to one of the company leaders, and I have heard rumors from other colleagues that I need to be careful – he is trying to make himself look better to regain his seniority. But with

all my travels, fatigue from my daily bus ride to work and the problems at home, I haven't had the energy to relate more with my leaders or take some of them out for lunch. I'm worried that Zhou is just waiting for me to make some small mistake so he can discredit me. But I hardly have the energy to be careful or do more to maintain good relations.

The tension at home has caused Lin to apply herself more to her job. She has fair English, so her boss wants her to translate technical papers for him. She was asked to help work with a foreign expert who came to the company to set up a new technical process. To succeed, she decided to go to night school to improve her English. This made my mother upset and she scolded Lin for her selfishness. Lin could hardly contain herself – she's really "eating bitterness."

Last month, my work unit offered us an apartment. But with the reforms, they are no longer providing or renting apartments – we need to buy it. Even with our two salaries together, the need to send money to Lin's parents and the cost of the apartment would mean that we would have to borrow quite a lot of money. But due to Lin's difficulty with my mother, we think we should consider it. Of course we haven't mentioned this to my parents yet – it will upset them. No matter how hard my mother is on Lin, she won't want us to move out. We'll have to find some way to honor them in this.

A former classmate offered me an occasional evening job helping with his company. It would help his business and would provide significant extra income when I'm not travelling. However, it would put more stress on the relationship between Lin and my parents, and could jeopardize my job. But I have to seriously consider it because we need the money.

Last week, Lin's work unit selected her to go overseas to learn another technical process to bring back to their factory. She would be gone for one year. On one hand she would be relieved to be able to get away from my mother, but she cannot bear the thought of us being separated. And

for that year, all her income would go to paying her living expenses overseas, so we would have to use part of my salary to send to her parents.

This makes buying a house now almost impossible. But if we do not buy immediately, we will have to wait at least two years until the next housing unit is finished. When she returns, she may get a small promotion that would help us later with housing payments. And if Lin is gone, maybe I can manage to do both jobs for more income.

Lin has been very stressed lately and has felt sick. Yesterday she went to the doctor for a check-up and found out that she is pregnant! What a disaster! After my parents turned off the TV and went to sleep in the next room, we cried quietly together. We surely cannot afford a baby now, but Lin is afraid of having an abortion. If she doesn't, she certainly will not be able to go to the US. We just don't know what to do.

There are so many contradictions pulling us in different directions – I sometimes wonder how long Lin or I can endure these difficulties. It seems wherever we turn we are faced with impossible pressures and decisions. How we long for peace of mind and stability as a family!

How do today's Mainland Chinese process life?

Chen and Lin's story both illustrates the complicated context and the set of motivational attitudes that seem to guide many Chinese. Below we identify nine basic mentalities that seem to guide Chinese through the challenges and decisions of life. Understanding these can help us understand how Chinese process the complexities of their lives.

1. Accept Unpredictability

Historically in China, life is arbitrary, uncontrollable and one of difficulty. With such a large population, scarce resources and a difficult history, people have learned to accept the vicissitudes of existence. Most Chinese hope that science, technology and stable government can help control nature and promote economic progress. But everyone is keenly aware that disasters still happen, policies change, circumstances are tough and one's family or best friends might prove unable to help.

“WHATEVER
CIRCUMSTANCE
COMES YOUR
WAY, ACCEPT IT
AS A WAY OF
LIFE.”

Mainland Chinese sometimes see the world as an uncertain, sometimes unfair place where suffering is inevitable. So they are ready to “eat bitterness” to scrape through and persevere. They believe that with resilience and sacrifice, they might get lucky to improve their lot in life. They are also usually not bitter about unfairness, but will try to find some way to adapt to the situation.

2. Pursue the Path of Least Resistance

Whatever social mindedness may have been present in the culture, the betrayals of previous campaigns taught people to be wary of trusting others. In such an arbitrary and difficult context, it is best to avoid as much trouble and inconvenience as possible. In general, Chinese are not crusaders for causes, but middle-of-the-roaders. They avoid sticking out in a crowd knowing that “the wind blows down the big tree.”

Most Chinese protect themselves by being passive, uninvolved or busy with their own affairs. Most try to quietly stay out of harm's way to eke out personal gains for themselves or their family. This is the advantage of modesty – if people don't know you have or are good at something, they won't bother you. Therefore most Chinese pursue the middle, the "Doctrine of the Golden Mean." When pressed to do something, many Chinese will acquiesce in order to avoid confrontation. There is often "no other way around it" but to submit to the system to maintain harmony.

"THE FIRST
BIRD TO FLY
GETS SHOT."



"THE NAIL
THAT STICKS
UP GETS HIT."



"THE WIND
BLOWS
DOWN THE
BIG TREE"

3. Seize Good Opportunities to Gain Benefit

When there is not enough to go around, each person tries to get what he can for himself and his network. Often there is no other way to get what one needs except by calling on previous connections (*guanxi*) to provide it indirectly, "going through the back door." Since most people in the mainland have few luxuries, they must find subtle and practical ways to best use their time, energy and connections. Everyone desires to honor his or her family by building a good reputation, gaining a good education or earning a good living. But the chances of doing so are very limited and must be grasped quickly and used wisely. Every opportunity costs something, so one must be willing to bear the risks as well as the potential gains. Some freedoms may have to be given up now to have more freedom later. Gaining a higher position of power or prosperity usually brings more fringe benefits to one's circles of relationships and is assumed to be good for everybody.

4. Strive for the Common Good of the In-group

Relationships define a person's significance. Though some Chinese acts may seem self-motivated, there is often a collective logic. People are integrally connected and committed to a complex network of family, old



schoolmates, and other instrumental contacts. Without this web of proven relationships, it is simply not possible to survive or thrive in society. As one grows up, he or she willingly, and often eagerly, responds to obligations and becomes indebted at varying levels to a limited group of people.

Since one has limited capacity to help others, Chinese invest their attention on that in-group. These obligations provide a safety net of tried and true relationships that can be relied on in a crisis. Thus “self” and “privacy” are generally viewed as negative and harmful to the collective “we.” You are who you know and how well you know them. This promotes a hierarchy of relationships, where each action will often be correlated to how important this relationship is compared to other relationships.

5. Give Face and Avoid Shame

Chinese tend to focus on what looks good or is good for others. In this social ethic it is usually important to be seen as a selfless person who brings harmony and stability to

relationships. Most Chinese fear shame and loss of honor, and desire to gain face.

Face is a kind of honor and self-respect that is publicly affirmed. Treating other people right gives them face. Losing self- or emotional control brings disharmony and loss of face to all the parties involved and brings shame, not only to oneself, but also to one's family. Schools use the threat of shame to promote good behavior. Parents use fear of shame as a tool to help their children obey and perform well at school. Children are conditioned to fit in and perform as expected in order to preserve their face. Therefore, it may be uncomfortably difficult for Chinese to admit when they are wrong. Instead, a face-saving justification or other cause is often sought. Direct confrontation is generally avoided.

6. Believe Behavior and Allow Flexibility with Words

Chinese place much emphasis on demonstrating proper behavior. "*Listen to words, but observe actions.*" In a system of practically motivated trust relationships, what one does is the most accurate indicator of true intentions. Most Chinese respond more to what is shown than told, and stories that illustrate behavior strike the heart more than conceptual statements. Verbal interaction is best done subtly, indirectly, descriptively. If the communication is potentially face-threatening, then it is best handled by a third-party, a trusted intermediary of both sides. What is said or printed does not have to be perfectly accurate so long as it portrays or elicits the desired image or response. In business, a written contract is primarily construed as making a relationship official, not as a legal stipulation of specific terms to be followed.

Deciding how to act in any given situation is often subconsciously evaluated on the basis of how one's family or in-group will respond. The western definition of "moral integrity" is not as important as relational approval, so a situational ethic prevails. Morality is judged by how people control their personal actions and rightly treat their important relationships. One chooses to act in a way that best satisfies the person at hand.

7. Demonstrate Hard Work and Sacrifice

Personal inconvenience and dutiful sacrifice reflect love and support. Silently working hard and suffering for others shows that one cares, is worthy of trust and wants to bring some benefit to the in-group. Personal feelings have little



public value, so Chinese try not to indulge in how they feel. Sentiments should be swallowed and controlled in the interest of group harmony. Open appreciation is seldom shown, and criticism is instead used as the chief motivator.

But acts of love are remembered with deep unexpressed emotion. The mother who was seldom home in order to earn more money for her child's extra tutorial or a father who sternly scolded his child to prod him on to pass the entrance examination are often recalled as touching memories. However, some parents are now becoming emotionally more expressive with their children, which is both longed for and greatly appreciated.

8. Defer to Authority and Show Respect

Hierarchy and authority are assumed necessary to keep order. In most relationships, someone has a higher rank, so it is important to know how to properly respond to superiors. Chinese seem to accept that the flow of history has allowed hierarchy and bureaucracy to exist to allocate the limited supply of resources. Their hope is that those in power will not abuse authority and be benevolent. Everyone has to know their place in the system to properly respect and honor those above them. However, each discretely considers how to advance his or her personal position. They try to do so without appearing overt or selfish in order not to arouse jealousy in others who might find ways to block them.

9. Be Practical and Gain Material Security

In this climate of fitting in, playing by the rules and keeping others happy, many feel that wealth provides the only true freedom. Some say that in Beijing, what's important is having access to power, while in Shanghai, one needs money. But whether in the North or the South, most Chinese feel a need to be very pragmatic and do what is required toward acquiring both status and wealth. Each situation is weighed on its merits and potential impact. Most people now believe that money is the primary way to open doors to a better future.

How do Chinese learn?

If the above list of mentalities guide Chinese thinking and behavior, how were these acquired or learned? And what will help them learn new ways of acting or interacting? Below are some key dimensions of the Chinese learning process.

☉ *Chinese Tend to be Teacher- and Content-Centered*

From the first day that a Chinese parent places their two-year old in nursery school, Chinese children join about 30 others and learn to unquestioningly follow their teacher's instructions. The classroom does not often promote individual attention, but

mass response. Students seldom dare to ask teachers questions for risk of causing a loss of face. The teacher should be in control and always right. The service rendered by a good, self-sacrificing teacher is honored with esteem and lifetime appreciation.

As a child progresses through the system, content also becomes important. Each course usually has one core textbook, and the teacher is the authoritative interpreter of that text in keeping with the current orthodoxy. In traditional Chinese societies, that standard was the prevailing interpretation of Confucian learning. Today, it is the current Party line. Chinese around the country are tuned in to learning officially approved information. Mastering what a good teacher tells you is the only way to pass examinations, and standardized examinations are the most reliable measure of what you have learned. Chinese assume that to govern a large population orderly, citizens need to be educated to affirm their limited options and follow established guidelines.

☉ *Chinese Tend toward Rote Learning*

From the beginning, learning to write Chinese characters, with their complicated strokes, requires rote learning. This style of copying the correct form carries over into how art, music and sports are also taught. Chinese develop amazing skills to imitate, memorize, recall and recite. These are employed effectively to identify the one right answer and attain perfect performance on tests. Memorizing model answers, essays or quotations is a shortcut to success and is not construed as cheating or plagiarism.

“HE WHO
LEARNS
‘TILL HE IS
OLD, LIVES
TO BE
OLD.”

Passing tests is essential to move up the educational hierarchy. Within every entrance examination is a political component. Whether they believe it or not, students who want to advance in the system memorize the current political jargon and reproduce it faithfully or risk not being admitted. After admission, the focus of even university

education is narrow—a “liberal education” in the western sense is not the goal. Most majors offer courses specialized on that major, and electives are usually taken with the same set of classmates all four years.

Chinese Tend to Think Deductively

Chinese are not limited in their ability to think. Their thinking style is, however, a function of their living in a hierarchical, relational culture where many decisions are made on the basis on how they would affect the people around them, not some abstract outside criteria. In many cases, the “right” answer is prescribed, so it would be foolish to try to think otherwise.

Decision-making thus focuses on deductive skills; “This choice must be right because of a, b, and c reasons.” In many fields, this kind of thinking is very effective and efficient. For a doctor who sees hundreds of patients a day, being able to quickly assess the likely illness and then check through a confirming list of three symptoms saves time and lives. Chinese tend to be good at synthesis and excel in fields requiring quick application of theoretical knowledge and precision. They consistently have the highest mathematics scores in the world.

The challenge is when Chinese cross over systems. In international companies, Western bosses find it challenging to promote creativity, individual responsibility, process thinking, or the inductive or analytical skills needed to identify the best option among a number of good choices. All of these functions are skills valued in an individualistic, democratic system. Chinese find them difficult because such skills carry relational risk –



looking like you know more than the boss, being too independent, shaking up the system are all good ways to lose favor in a Chinese context.

So employees generally construe specialized jobs for themselves and refrain from broader responsibilities. “Thinking for oneself,” preventive problem solving or general, skill-based applications are not the norm. Asking a group “What do you think?” usually garners a silent response until rapport and group trust is painstakingly developed. It behooves us to understand how Chinese think so that we have appropriate expectations and find ways to communicate effectively.

How do Chinese view foreigners?

☪ *As Teachers or Experts*

If Chinese have encountered a foreigner, it has usually been in the classroom or in their company as a “foreign expert.” The Chinese context and culture is considered as so deep and difficult to adjust to, that anyone who comes here must be some kind of specialized expert bringing knowledge, services or business to China. This can promote two tendencies: either to welcome the foreigner and lean heavily on what they say to do, or to resent the foreigner and passively ignore or resist their influence. In either case, the ethic of saving face will probably mean that the foreigner is outwardly shown respect.

☪ *As Outsiders*

Because Chinese lives have been linked together over their personal history, the foreigner comes in as an outsider, someone outside the network. Some will view us with wariness because we are under no obligations to respond in predictable ways. Others will find this freedom attractive and will divulge feelings, secrets or other special information to us because we are external to the system of obligation relationships.

This level of communication might cause us to feel very close and, over time, we may even consider ourselves “insiders.” But in their minds, we are always outside the system, quite remote

from the years of uncertain experiences and social conditioning that other Chinese have gone through. Being constantly reminded of our outsider status and our inability to understand may frustrate or disappoint us, but it is a reality. So the dynamics of our relationship will tend to operate in unique and sometimes unpredictable ways.

☉ *As Privileged*

Obviously, to be in China we must have had enough independence and money to get here. The general assumption is that we are relatively wealthy and free. We are also English speakers, the new ticket to world success. So realize that many will initiate relationships assuming that we have been luckier than they have and therefore have something valuable to offer them. Failure to find creative ways to meet their expectations, no matter how inaccurate, may cause them to later resent or ignore us.

☉ *As an Opportunity*

There is a very small ratio of foreigners to the total population of China. So if someone has had the good fortune of meeting a foreigner, it must be destiny, a once in a lifetime chance. In a society of limited opportunities, one would be a fool to let such a rare chance go by. So be ready for unusually bold approaches, for abrupt requests to do or give something, for assistance in an attempt to go abroad, for persistent requests to be their “old friend,” or help them out with some new possibility. Foreigners do have much value that they can bring, but it soon becomes painfully obvious how limited is our capacity and how limitless the needs.

How might Chinese respond to us?

One of the challenges we face as foreigners in relationships with Chinese is of rarely being able to discern why they are relating to us. Is it for friendship, for the assistance we can provide, for some future opportunity, or is it because they see the difference Christ has made in our lives? Though there is great spiritual hunger in China, it often finds expression as material longing or

as opportunism. This diversion of longing is what draws many to cults, to other religions or to us for the wrong reasons.

Aware of how Chinese process life and view us, the following situation illustrates how some Chinese might respond to us. Imagine that you have befriended Miss Wang and have been sharing the gospel with her.

A Possible, But Not Desired Response:

“This foreigner has been very kind to me. She is a very good person, and has done so much for me. Her religion is very important to her, so I should respect it, even though I don’t understand it. She keeps inviting me to read the Bible, so I’ll do that to give her face. If she asks me to become a Christian, I can tell her yes, because I don’t want to disappoint her or cause her to be embarrassed by my refusal. Besides, calling myself a Christian could be good for me when I hunt for jobs after graduation. I’ve heard that some foreign bosses trust you more if they know you are a Christian. Anyway, most people think Christians are good.

My grandmother doesn’t, however – she believes in Buddhism and is still upset about how missionaries came to her town and upset the local spirits. Like many of her generation, she blames foreigners for all the misery in her childhood and has some superstitious ideas. But she’s my granny and I love and respect her. I’ll keep burning incense when I go to the temple with her at Chinese New Year. Who knows? Maybe the spirits will give me luck on my exams. I’ll not tell her I’ve been reading the Bible with a foreigner – why does she need to know that? I just can’t invite my foreign friend home as long as Granny is alive, but that’s easy enough to find excuses for.

Anyway, I don’t really think there is a real God in the world – it’s just something in our minds. But it won’t hurt anyone if I act like I do believe that, and it will probably even help me be better. Impressions are important, you know. At least, I’m lucky to have a native speaker to learn English from. I can’t jeopardize this chance to learn as much as I can about foreigners and about western culture, even if it is from the Bible. What have I got to lose? So I’ll continue to be

interested in order to keep this friendship. She is essential to my future, and she is a nice person.”

This illustration in no way implies that many people we meet will think, feel or respond this way. But some foreigners have experienced situations like this, and being outsiders, we often do not have the insights or cues to be able to discern true intentions. But, aware of such responses, we can pray and be prepared. Through prayer, life witness, God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, we can trust that God can use us to help others make genuine commitments to follow Jesus.

How do Chinese generally view God?

Traditionally God has been marginalized in the Chinese culture. God, gods, and ghosts all might exist, but the practical person need not dwell on them. Confucius set the secular tone of the culture when he said, “Respect gods and ghosts but keep them at a distance.” Confucius’ conception of “heaven” was an impersonal, unknowable force that somehow guided human affairs.

“MAN CAN
MAKE PLANS,
BUT HEAVEN
MUST CAUSE
THEM TO
SUCCEED.”

The Christian view of a personal God is foreign to the Chinese, as is our notion of theology—trying to figure out who God is and what He requires of us. In normal Chinese thinking, these things are not for us to figure out.

This doesn’t mean God is totally absent. The Chinese have a utilitarian approach to the spirit world. If there is a “god,” he is generally a fatherly figure who exists to help mankind have good luck or blessing. This concept of “god” can be called on in times of need, especially sickness, financial crisis or examinations. If it works, then all the better. But the emphasis of the younger generation is usually more on what people can do to feel that they have appeased the spirits (visit a temple, burn joss sticks, have your fortune told) than on the actual impact of the spirit world.

“KNOWING
CONTENTMENT
BRINGS
ENDURING
PEACE.”

☉ *Buddhism and Traditional Folk Religion*

Historically, many have sought solace in Buddhism. Going to the temple, rubbing prayer beads or saying Buddhist scriptures provide a religious, psychological way to escape the suffering of daily life. The goal is to find an other-worldly contentment and peace. Others blend Buddhism with traditional Chinese folk religion. These devotees try to appease the arbitrary forces of the gods or cosmos by setting out fruit and vegetable offerings or observing special ceremonies at certain times of the year. Both groups of followers acknowledge that the gods are also arbitrary. It is a gamble whether they will give assistance.

☉ *Fate and Retribution*

Many Chinese are satisfied in holding a vague sense of fate or destiny – maybe there is some impersonal force in heaven that can influence our lives. Experience suggests that there is some cosmic order. Good actions seem to reap good results and bad actions seem to be punished. Who knows where this rewarding/retributive force comes from? It could be superstition, or it could just be the way the world is. In recent years, seeing fortune-tellers, reading palms, consulting “fengshui” experts (geomancy) or even calling on the dead (necromancy) has been becoming popular.

“GOOD WILL BE
REWARDED
WITH GOOD,
AND EVIL’S
RETRIBUTION
IS EVIL.”

☉ *Taoism and Qi Gong*

Some Chinese prefer the ancient traditions of Taoism. Taoists went back to nature to seek mystical oneness with the cosmos and made peace with the great paradoxes and competing powers of life. Today, this has been revived as many seek cosmic empowerment through Qi Gong, a spiritual breathing and martial arts method. As one practices and yields to this supernatural, likely demonic, power, he or she can perform miraculous psychic feats or bring healing to the mind and body.

☉ *Scientific Atheism*

Most believe evolution and Communism have explained away God. Darwinism is established fact in all Chinese schools. Marxism is avidly atheistic. Even if there was some god he seems unscientific and irrelevant. As Confucius admitted, “We do not yet know how to serve man, so how can we even begin to serve the spirits? We do not yet understand life, so how can we begin to understand death?” Secularism and materialism are the current foci of this life, and there is little or no thought of a hereafter.

“WE DO NOT
YET KNOW
HOW TO
SERVE MAN,
SO HOW CAN
WE EVEN
BEGIN TO
SERVE THE
SPIRITS?”
- *CONFUCIUS*

The present world is what matters. Most Chinese today believe in their own efforts. Living life honorably and well, being prosperous, being satisfied – these are the main concerns of the Chinese soul. Even though they try to remain pragmatic, they will privately admit to a gnawing sense of emptiness and a deep need for inner peace.

☉ *Religious Awakening*

China is changing on this front also. Buddhism, now with over 100 million adherents, is becoming popular again. Many are returning to Taoism or other traditional spiritual expressions. One Qi Gong movement claims up to 70 million followers in Mainland China. These numbers are still small in a country of 1.3 billion, but each religious expression seeks to meet the spiritual vacuum of the people. Even if estimates are inflated, the sense of inner need is becoming evident.

☉ *Expressions of God's Family*

Perhaps this hunger is most evident in the continued interest in Christian faith. In 1949 when the Communists came to power, there were only 1 million reported believers. Most estimate that there are now tens of millions who have become Christians. The seed sown by early missionaries, the climate of suffering, dramatic testimonies of lives filled with peace and purpose seemed to help facilitate a dramatic turning to faith. Though persecution broke ties to the great diversity of foreign denominations and the Party claims unity under its jurisdiction,

it is important to note that there are still several expressions of the family of faith on the Mainland.

1. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)

The idea of “self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating” began in the early part of this century. Indigenous Christian leaders feared too much dependence on foreign organizations and decried the “rice Christian” tendency. But as the Party established its control in the 1950’s, the idea served the United Front Department to bring all church activity under the control of its Religious Affairs Bureau. The Red Guards mercilessly used that control during the Cultural Revolution to intensely persecute Christianity as a western religion. Books were burned, churches were closed and turned into factories and church leaders suffered indescribably. This great political pressure pushed some to recant their faith or betray other believers.

As the excesses of the Cultural Revolution were redressed, churches began to be opened again in the early 80’s. Thousands of believers, primarily older people, began to flock to the restored churches, and most locations held multiple services throughout the weekend. Each church building under the Three-Self Movement organized a pastoral team to conduct church affairs. These teams had mixed denominational backgrounds and political orientation. Some of the leaders whom the Party trusted were considered “nation loving” pastors while others were identified as “God loving” pastors. Together they work together to keep their congregation safely under the parameters the Party has established, meet the needs of diverse groups of the faithful, sponsor some sanctioned house groups or preaching points and establish new congregations.

There continues to be a mix of loyalties among TSPM church leaders, but most believers who have chosen to attend worship services, Bible studies or other church sponsored activities are grateful to be able to worship openly and thankful for those pastors who are serving God. Many see God at work as they help provide community services, invite their unbelieving neighbors, and testify openly. Three-Self Services are no longer primarily attended by old people. Since the mid-80’s, high school and college students have filled the pews, and most

churches have very active youth and singles groups. New member classes continue to be full as many are attracted to Christianity and want to express their commitment in baptism.

2. House Churches

But some believers are wary of government-sanctioned churches. Some still have memories of the betrayals of the 1950's and 60's. Others find the open churches too compromising with government policy or the doctrine too watered down. For varying reasons, they chose to stay disconnected with the open movement and develop their own house groups or underground networks.

Some of these groups have strong historical links to indigenous pioneers like Wang Mingdao or Watchman Nee. Others sprang up through the influence of a local evangelist or an English teacher. Some are extended family and neighbor networks in the countryside that have witnessed a miracle of healing or the powerful preaching of an itinerant. With the variety of ways in which these house groups started, there is also wide range of how the gospel is expressed and what doctrines are emphasized, from very conservative fundamentalism to Spirit-centered movements to more radical, cult-like expressions. With much of China still minimally literate, teachers exert a great influence, and well-trained Christian workers are still few.

House church believers also have varying responses to current political conditions. Younger groups tend to be quite open and may talk freely with family members or fellow students. Older, more established networks tend to be extremely wary. Some have personally, or know a leader who has, experienced police questioning, arrest or internment. Such groups often pay much attention to security—not mentioning names or places on the phone, exchanging most information when they meet, changing the times and days of their meetings. Some of them avoid contact with foreigners since that might easily arouse more suspicion and endanger their activities.

3. Secret or Independent Believers

Throughout the country, there are still some who have kept their interest in the Gospel a private affair. For some it is due to a highly responsible position or Party affiliation. For others it

is out of fear. For still others, it comes from unclarity about what following Christ entails. Among intellectuals and young business people, there appear to be many cultural Christians—people who appreciate theology, Christian goodness or the influence of Christianity on democracy, but who may not yet personally know Christ.

Remember that categories are not mutually exclusive. Someone who is a secret believer at work may attend house church worship and go occasionally to the open church for other activities. As newcomers, and foreigners besides, we will live with some ambiguity about the faith condition or involvement of some of our colleagues or associates.

How do Chinese tend to view sin and salvation?

“PLANT
MELON SEEDS
AND YOU GET
MELONS; SOW
BEANS AND
YOU GET
BEANS.”

☯ *Man is Good by Nature*

Chinese generally believe that man is basically good and perfectible. Evil comes from the imperfections of an undeveloped society. Criminals usually become so because of the influence of a bad context. So it is the school and government’s responsibility to help people become better through education.

Responsibility is something external, not internal. Respond to what you are told. How can you be accountable for what no one told you? Wrong personal actions may be due to someone else or some context influencing us.

If someone becomes bad, then he or she must be re-educated. The Chinese approach to law has traditionally been to harshly correct the bad exceptions as an example to help others stay good, thus the saying, “Kill a chicken to scare the monkeys.”

☯ *Goodness is a Public Morality*

A person is deemed bad or good based on his visible actions. No one is guilty unless he is caught committing a crime. If he is

bad enough to be caught, then he is automatically guilty and must be publicly punished. Capital punishment is often necessary for those who obviously have become so bad they can no longer develop goodness.

When people meet others, they seem to subconsciously evaluate whether this is a good or bad person. Nice people are considered to have a “good” temper. To be labeled a “good” person is an honor – others consider you to be a model.

☉ *Sin is “Crime”*

Chinese react defensively to the word “sin” because it means “crime” in Chinese. A person who believes they are innately good will not admit to being a criminal. They therefore feel little need to be saved from anything. If foreign believers focus on the future benefits of salvation and eternal life, most Chinese will dismiss it as impractical. It is important to stay pragmatic.

Most Chinese struggle with how to keep up a good appearance. The more important one’s position or problem, the harder it gets to maintain ideals of goodness. When Chinese pursue perfection, they generally have an understanding that they don’t meet that ideal.

They also place high value on harmony in relationships and respect for authority. As the Good News of Jesus is presented, the message can focus on how He is the One who is perfect. Only He brings harmony between God and humankind, breaks down the barriers of hostility between the two, mediates and can make us good. Jesus as God is thus our perfect authority, worthy of respect.

How might Chinese respond to Jesus?

The kingdom of God has expanded very rapidly in China during the last 50 years. Foreign missionaries were expelled in the early 1950’s, but the good news of Jesus kept spreading at an incredible rate. In reflecting on many stories of how Chinese have responded to Jesus, two key points surface. Chinese have primarily responded to the miraculous works of God and they

have responded to the goodness and peace demonstrated in the lives of believers. Below are stories representing both points.

- They Respond to God's Power

One day in our village, my brother-in-law got very sick with a bloated stomach. I know nothing about Christianity but my mother-in-law does and asked all family members to pray for her son. So I agreed to do it. They set a time – 3 am – to stay in separate rooms to pray. I didn't know what I was doing. I woke at 2 am with something fighting in my mind – I knew I needed to do it. At 3 am I started to pray – but I said a simple sentence I will never forget. "Lord, I don't know if you exist, but if you do, let my brother-in-law's stomach not hurt tomorrow and I will believe you the rest of my life."

After that, I went into a different world. I saw a person with a long robe, spotless white very close to me. I tried to back up. I was afraid. Then I saw a wide-open field with my brother-in-law lying in bed. The person in the white robe gently touched his stomach and two streams of water came out. My brother-in-law's stomach went flat. The person with the white robe came back to him and let him see his face very close then left.

The next day we took my brother-in-law to the doctor. It took two people to take him. I then went shopping for vegetables. When I got home, my brother-in-law was already back. He walked home by himself.

My brother-in-law doesn't believe; he always makes fun of believers when mother brings them in. So I don't want him to know I prayed for him. I asked what happened to his stomach. He said, "I don't know. The doctor didn't do anything. It just happened. Usually they have to put a needle in."

Now I am in trouble. I have to believe the rest of my life. I feel a heavy burden on myself because I made that promise. I felt obligated. What I did know was Jesus was very powerful and I could count on him. And seeing that person

in the robe gave me great peace. So I want to talk to my mother-in-law about it and belong to God's people.

There continue to be amazing reports of how God has used miraculous intervention to draw people to himself throughout China. In areas with limited literacy, this is sometimes the norm. Healings, dreams, miraculous answers to prayer, all have been used by the Holy Spirit to show God's power and open hearts. Even among intellectuals there have been wonderful testimonies of healing and resulting transformation.

Wherever lives have been changed, their acts of love and kindness also reflect the power and peace of God. Many have begun their pilgrimage toward Christ by observing the sacrificial acts or gracious service of concerned believers.



- They Respond to God's People
I'm Gao from Gansu, one of China's poorest provinces. After I graduated from a three-year technical college, I got a job at the big paper mill. I did well in my job and showed an aptitude for translating English faxes to our overseas customers, so my boss decided to send me to improve my English in an intensive English program in Chengdu. There I met my first foreigners.

My teacher was quite different from the rest. He showed his concern and commitment by often coming to our classroom after class to talk. He invited us to his home. But the thing that hit me most was when he invited some of our classmates to go with him to the local orphanage. There we found out that he and his wife went two or three times a week to hold the orphaned Chinese infants, bathe them, care for them. I held back the tears when I saw how this foreigner loved my people so much to go to such an unlucky, shameful place. My classmates and I asked why, and he said the love of God helped him do that.

That's when I started reading the Bible with him. I felt I could trust a person who sacrificed so much. And I desperately wanted the peace and power he had to face such tragedies with love because they made me feel helpless and ashamed. After several months of study, I asked Jesus to give me that.

That was two years ago. Last year, I discovered that I had eternal life. Funny how that never even entered my mind when I first prayed to God. I just wanted benefits for this life. God has given peace and blessed me in many ways.

Just recently I started to discover what sin is. My teacher talked to me about "sin" several times, but it made no sense then – I thought I was a good person and couldn't consider admitting to such a thing. But the Holy Spirit has been showing me that God's standards of "crime" are quite different than my own, so now I'm starting to confess my mistakes and ask him for forgiveness. This has really made me feel closer to Jesus Christ. I'm amazed by the shame that He endured just to make me good before God. I hope that I can become as good a person as my teacher was so that others want to find out about God's love from me.

But it's not easy. I'm back in Gansu now and haven't found any other Christians. I'm turning thirty, so my parents have found a really good match for me and are urging me to marry her. They see that I'm different and listened to my desire to marry a Christian, but argue there just aren't any in our province. The girl they like is nice and I think we could get

along O.K., but she never even heard of Jesus until I told her my story! She does admire me, so maybe I should keep seeing her, hoping she believes. I want to honor my parents, so maybe I just need faith to marry her. My teacher has gone back to England, but I recently wrote him to pray for me. I want to do what is right, but it is hard to know how.

What can we learn from the Chinese?

☉ *God's Love for Diverse Humanity*

Jesus came to demonstrate the full extent of the Father's love to humanity. Since Mainland Chinese are nearly 20 percent of humanity, one of the obvious aspects is that we can learn more of the Fathers' love for them. Learn to see His delight in the Chinese people and His passion for them. Let learning to love people different from you deeply impact your understanding of God's expansive love for all men and His specific love for you. Many have discovered new insights into God's character through the unique qualities in this culture.

☉ *Extended Family Values*

We can learn much about the value of family from the Chinese. The Western world generally ignores the extended family, and the nuclear family has often been split. Chinese families are undergoing much change today, but traditionally honoring elders and caring for family are still highly valued. What are we in the West doing to biblically love and care for our immediate and extended families? How are we honoring our elders? Observe the Chinese perspectives and learn from them.

☉ *Caring for Our In-Group*

We can also learn much about the practical dimensions of caring for our in-group. Westerners from birth have been pushed to extreme individualism. Dependence on and trust in others is not encouraged. We can learn much from how the Chinese develop



obligations and trust commitments, how they sacrifice for one another and support each other in difficult times. We may need to get over our fear of “being used.”

☉ *Self Defined in Other – in God*

The West has exalted the concept of the autonomous Self to levels of self-idolatry. To the Chinese, Self is closely integrated

with Other, and for some, only completed in Other. Unfortunately, that Other hasn't included God as the definer of Self. However, we can still learn much from the Chinese about a Self in deep need of completion in relationship with Others – God, family, friends, nature, etc.

☉ *Obeying and Respecting Authority*

Face is a very important concept in the Chinese mindset. This concept is often accentuated in hierarchical, power- and authority-based societies. In the West, these concepts sound like dirty words yet God renders strong words to those who “despise authority” (2 Peter 2:10). Obviously, power can be abused, but the lack of honoring authority results in anarchy – a far worse predicament. We in the West can learn the value of respecting those in authority and honoring God, the Author of all authority.

☉ *Perseverance and Suffering*

All Chinese have endured incredible difficulty and most have done so without bitterness. Many have an amazing contentment in their harsh lives and impoverished surroundings. Christians, especially older believers or leaders, have especially endured much, but most have “considered it all joy.” We can learn much from fellowshiping with these humble, gracious followers of Christ.

☉ *Faith in Daily Life*

Faith in Christ is often viewed in eternal terms and rightfully so. But for some in the West, faith becomes only future “fire insurance” while daily life continues unaffected. The historical mindset of the Chinese is to find harmony in the life we now have. Such a mindset is not at all in opposition to the wisdom books of the Bible. We can learn much about focusing on living life well, on living in harmony with ourselves, others and nature in the present while placing our hope in an eternal future in the very presence of God.

We will stop with these limited suggestions, but obviously much more can be learned as you make friends with Chinese individuals, families and groups and honor them as Chinese – people created by God to bring Him glory. As you relate to Mainland Chinese you can ask Him to bring new light to

passages of scripture, new insight into dimensions of living out Kingdom culture, and new realizations into areas of our own cultural blindness and need for transformation.

How does an understanding of the Chinese soul influence the way you relate to Chinese?

☪ *Pray for God's intervention and direction.*

God moves in the heavens. He answers the heart prayers of His people. Pray for China. Ask Him to open the hearts and eyes of the Chinese people to see His love and power and authority. In

“HE HAS MADE
EVERYTHING
BEAUTIFUL IN ITS
TIME. HE HAS ALSO
SET ETERNITY IN
THE HEARTS OF
MEN”
ECCLESIASTES 3:11

China, our cultural barriers are vast, our message seems foreign, people are wrapped up in their own battle for survival and increased prosperity, and hearts are diverted by daily concerns. It will take the Spirit's supernatural intervention to break into your friend's lives. God may have been practically set aside in their worldview, but Chinese are still very open to call on Him in time of need. Many Chinese have come to Christ as

a result of God wondrously answering prayers. Ask God to do miraculous things to draw people to Himself. Trust Him to supernaturally guide you to the right person at the right time. Ask Him to establish them firm in the faith through godly models that live biblical, Spirit-empowered lives.

☪ *Find ways to affirm your friend's nationality.*

Just as you are thankful for the blessings that you had to be born in your home country, each Chinese can and should count it a privilege that God determined that they should be born Chinese. Find ways to affirm the positive dimensions that God sovereignly placed in their cultural heritage. How incredible it is that they were born in this country at this point in history, to have the great traditions of the last centuries and experience perhaps the fastest economic development of any country in history. How thankful they must be that God has given the

opportunities that they are facing today, to have bright prospects for their future, and to have the potential to offer the world qualities which may be diminished in other cultures. Being Chinese has great value! Becoming a Chinese believer will have even greater value and will enhance the Kingdom of God.

☺ *Smile*

Don't overlook the importance of a happy face. An amazing finding from the visual research project was the incredible impact of smiles on Chinese. A smile is the key symbol of goodness. Chinese like and use smiles to give face and cover up fear or embarrassment. It is not unusual to have Chinese respond with a smile or giggle when they witness an accident, face an embarrassing situation or are confronted. A smile can break down a tense situation quickly and helps build trust. Many Chinese express how much they appreciate foreigners who have open (but not too exaggerated), calm and sincere facial expressions.

“SEND
CHARCOAL IN
SNOWY
WEATHER”
MEANING,
“PROVIDE
TIMELY AND
APPROPRIATE
HELP.”

☺ *Build relationships by experiencing life together and being dependable*

Show your Chinese friends that you are interested in building genuine relationship with them. For them, this means sharing experiences together. Be willing to do things together without expecting a deep level of talk in the beginning. Chinese learn a lot about each other through non-verbal communication, so demonstrate that you are loyal, trustworthy, good-hearted. As you do activities together, learn to be comfortable with times of silence between you. When your friends do talk, be a good listener, trying not to interrupt with many questions. As trust is built through shared times together, they will feel free to divulge some important things or even feelings to you. But be content that they might not entrust you with everything. Chinese tend to reveal some things to one

“LIVE SUCH
GOOD LIVES
AMONG
(THEM...THAT)
THEY MAY SEE
YOUR GOOD
DEEDS AND
GLORIFY
GOD...”
I PETER 2:12

friend and other things to another friend. Be grateful and confidentially guard what they do share with you. Friendship is not a casual thing in China—it is a commitment and an investment.

☉ *Minister by showing kindness and goodness in relationships*

Often our Western view of ministry is focused on “truth dispensing.” We may need to learn “life offering” through seeking opportunities to demonstrate God’s love, power and kindness. Hospitality is a direct ministry to Chinese – visit them and let them see where you live – life on life. Consider other meaningful ways to serve your Chinese friends, ways to meet legitimate needs they or their in-group have that will show unmerited kindness and love.

As Chinese place their faith in Jesus, encourage them to relate to and live within their family and friendship groups where they are already insiders. It may be best for them to delay telling their in-groups about their decision for Christ – their testimony often has much more impact once they start demonstrating Christ’s life. Changed lives speak volumes more in China than zealous preaching. Pray that you and they can effectively “walk your talk.”

Seek to develop relationships with a network of people, not just isolated individuals. As someone asked, “Are we fishing with a hook, or with a net?” Ask God to give you opportunities to meet their family or friends. If their in-group views you as a good and benevolent person, they may view association with you more positively. This keeps the door open for others to follow as they see the Spirit’s fruit in your friend’s life. As in the Book of Acts, whole families may come to Christ, and many have.

“THE
KINDNESS OF
A DROP OF
WATER WILL
BE REPAID
WITH A
FLOWING
SPRING.”

☉ *Be Sensitive to Security*

Many people you meet will conduct themselves very openly as if China had no restrictions. But seasoned believers would prefer that you use some discretion and caution in the way you

communicate your faith. As a foreigner, seeking out involvement with house groups could jeopardize their gathering. Be aware that China has the technology to record phone calls, pick up mobile phone conversations, and intercept fax and e-mail transmissions. Most believers use discrete vocabulary over these forms of public communication. As a foreigner, ask God to teach you how to conduct yourself with spiritual sensitivity and prudence, so you can live at peace with the authorities and still obey God's call.

☉ *Consider that Chinese may come to Jesus from different motives than Westerners*

Many Westerners have trusted Christ in order to be free from guilt, have eternal life and find a purpose for living. But, since sin is a confusing concept for the Chinese, they may respond to other aspects of Jesus' message. They have a deep sense of good and bad – and they desire to be good. The present life is more of a consideration than eternal life in their worldview. Their orientation emphasizes benefit, face and relationships. Some Chinese have come to Christ out of respect for God, some with a desire for peace or blessing, others from gratitude for healing, still others from a sense of duty to the One in their dreams. Some observe the quality of life of believers, their goodness and kindness in relationships, and desire to become like them through belief in Jesus. Each person may have a different starting point, and most will be different from westernized culture. Be open to God's agenda.

So how can I respond to the Chinese soul?

This small booklet has hopefully begun to illumine some of the significant aspects of the Mainland Chinese soul, but it goes without saying that each person you meet is a unique individual. They may or may not adhere to some of the ideas highlighted above. China is changing rapidly, and some people you meet may be very westernized. Others may be even more traditional

and conservative than anything mentioned here. Others may exhibit an almost paradoxical mix of traditional and modern.

Don't be fooled by outer appearances, though. Many young Chinese may eat at Pizza Hut or McDonalds, wear Levis and Nikes, smoke Marlboros, watch Hollywood movies, rave about Celine Dion and Michael Jackson and outwardly act very westernized.

But research shows that inwardly they may still espouse quite traditional values or attitudes, especially toward family, relationship loyalties and matters of the heart. When it comes to the soul, people usually respond in the way that is most natural for them - the way they were raised.



So be ready for anything. Let the Lord guide you as you seek to relate appropriately to each individual and network that you meet. And may He bless you as you journey in understanding the longings of both your own soul and those of the Chinese.

Summary of Key Thoughts

On the Chinese Context

Where do we begin as we think about ministering in the Chinese culture?

*Chinese begin with the past –
“Looking backward to go forward.”
China has a glorious past culture
China is burdened by its recent history
China is a populous country with limited resources
China engenders paradoxes and contradictions*

How has the past affected the Chinese?

*China is a resilient culture
China is an authoritarian culture
China is a mass culture
China is an insider culture
China is a relational culture –
“Guanxi” connections and close-knit circles
China is a communal, extended-family culture
Chinese culture puts its hope in its children
China has been a male-dominated culture
China is a power and submission-oriented culture*

How do Chinese view the future?

China is a changing culture

What are the longings of Chinese today?

*A longing for national restoration
A longing for family harmony and prosperity
A longing for improved chances and personal success
A longing for inner satisfaction and perfect peace*

On the Chinese Viewpoint

How do today's Mainland Chinese process life?

Accept unpredictability

Pursue the path of least resistance

Seize good opportunities to gain benefit

Strive for the common good of the in-group

Give face and avoid shame

Believe behavior and allow flexibility with words

Demonstrate hard work and sacrifice

Defer to authority and show respect

Be practical and gain material security

How do Chinese learn?

Chinese tend to be teacher and content-centered

Chinese tend to be rote learners

Chinese tend to think deductively

How do Chinese view foreigners?

As teachers or experts

As outsiders

As privileged

As an opportunity

On the Chinese Spiritual Orientation

How do Chinese generally view God?

Through Buddhism

Through traditional folk religion

Through Fate and retribution

Through Taoism and Qi Gong

Through Scientific atheism

Religious awakening

Expressions of God's Family

The Three-Self-Movement

House Churches

Secret or Independent Believers

How do Chinese tend to view sin and salvation?

Man is good

Goodness is a public morality

Sin is "crime"

How might Chinese respond to Jesus?

They respond to God's power

They respond to God's people doing good

What can we learn from the Chinese?

God's love for diverse humanity

Extended family values

Caring for our in-group

Self defined in God

Obeying and respecting authority

Perseverance and suffering

Faith in daily life

How does an understanding of the Chinese soul influence the way you relate to Chinese?

Pray for God's intervention and direction

Find ways to affirm your friend's nationality

Smile

Build relationships

by experiencing life together and being dependable

Minister by showing kindness and goodness in relationships

Be sensitive to security

Consider that Chinese may come to Jesus

from different motives than Westerners

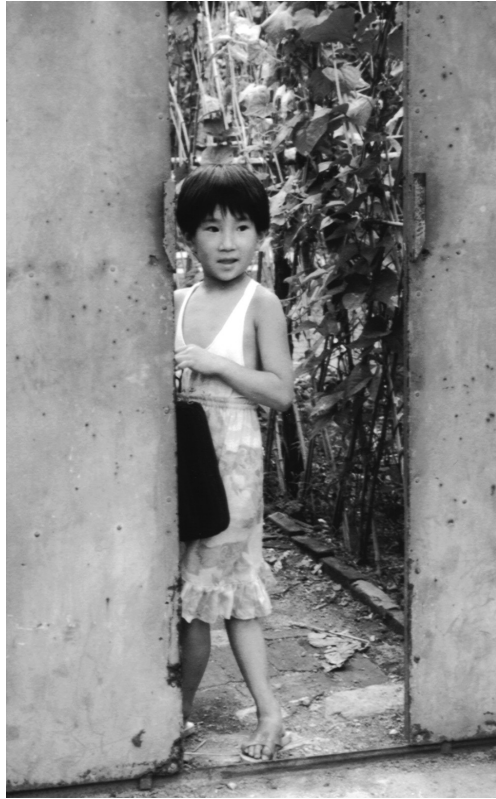
About the Authors

A diverse team of more than 30 people from different backgrounds and locations worked on this project. Most have actively studied or engaged in ministering to Chinese for more than a decade. They have volunteered to contribute to this project anonymously.

The prayer of all who have been involved is that the insights woven together in these pages will enable you in your desire to relate to and serve the Chinese.

Copyright 2001

AN INTRODUCTION TO



THE MAINLAND CHINESE SOUL

Your book is really excellent. It's also written compassionately – your obvious love for the Chinese people. The stories also reflect the realities of life. Your book will be a tremendous help for all who have the Chinese people at heart - and for those who labour both inside China as well as outside, including the many international students going to the Western world. I will be using it myself with many of our potential and present colabourers who are ministering among the Chinese.

Jim Chew author of
"When You Cross Cultures"

This unique booklet blends profound insights into China's history and culture with poignant real-life stories of individuals in China today. The result is both highly informative and deeply touching. Never before has there been such an effective orientation tool for those preparing to serve in China. For those with China experience, "An Introduction to the Mainland Chinese Soul" puts words to the often unspoken feelings that arise when East and West intersect and brings to light the hidden factors that can make the difference in relationships between empathy and misunderstanding. Deceptively simple and straightforward in its presentation, this concise sketch speaks volumes about the roots of contemporary Chinese values and attitudes, including perceptions of the once-foreign Christian Gospel that is now finding fertile ground in the hearts and minds of many Chinese. Its perceptive analysis of Chinese attitudes toward spiritual matters not only reveals the obstacles to sharing one's faith within the

Chinese context but also points out natural bridges of understanding that span cultural differences and connect the reality of the Gospel with the realities of today's China. "An Introduction to the Mainland Chinese Soul" is a must-read for all who seek a deeper understanding of China and the Chinese people.

Dr. Brent Fulton, President, ChinaSource

This is a very unusual publication. On the one hand it contains sharply accurate and crisply concise descriptions of Chinese society today and the mindsets of many Chinese, especially young urban professionals. For example, in explaining how networks of relationships work in China, the difference between "insiders" and "outsiders", or how idealism and pragmatic realism coexist, it clearly portrays the dynamics and complexities of Chinese aspirations today, but it does so in a very reader-friendly fashion. No jargon, and concrete, understandable examples. Yet the result is a perceptive profile of China today that any academic sociologist or anthropologist specialist on China would be hard pressed to surpass for its insights. Yet in addition to its intellectual value, which is considerable, the contents are shaped to serve a distinctly Christian view of Chinese society. This little volume will be one of the most valuable resources available to any non-Chinese Christian hoping to establish meaningful relationships with Chinese people and to understand the Chinese society of which they are a part. I recommend this publication highly!

Dr. Daniel Bays, Professor of History, Calvin College

Editor of "Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present"