

# Cross cultural differences- china and usa

[Countries](#), [China](#)



| THE 101: Cross Cultural Issues in Tourism & Hospitality | Assessment No. 2|  
| Ariana Janjua| 201111790| Culture, as defined by Geert Hofstede, is the "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another". (Hofstede, 2011) It is due to the research carried out by scholars such as Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars that we are able to understand cultural values, and the difference in cultures more thoroughly. This information gives us the ability to understand, and interact people for other cultures that may be drastically different from our own.

Such research also gives a basis by which social and business dealings can be held. (itim International, n. d) Knowledge of other cultures is imperative when dealing with business relations; it has been helpful in the age of globalization where cross-cultural business is at a dramatic rise, and even aids in such things as the training and communications. It is also crucial in the face of tourism and social life, as it gives us the understanding of how people from other cultures function as a result of their particular set of cultural values.

The aim of this essay is to provide a deeper understanding between the cultural differences between two very different cultures: those of China and the USA. The essay is divided into two parts: the first will explore the different cultural dimensions present in a social and business context according to the research by Hofstede and Trompenaars. The second part will give an example of a practical application of this information in the hospitality industry, and will provide recommendations upon which American hotels can better accommodate Chinese guests.

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As mentioned above, Hofstede was a Dutch scholar who performed intensive research in order to fully understand his five cultural dimensions, of which this essay looks more deeply into three: Power Distance, Individuality and Long Term Orientation. From his results, we can compare the differences in these dimensions between China and the USA. (itim International, n. d) As can be seen, there is a remarkable difference in all the indexes, especially in PDI (China 80, USA 40), IDV (China 20, USA 91) and LTO (118, USA 29) (China, 2011).

These figures give us a starting point to understand these differences more thoroughly. Power Distance is the extent to which people respond to inequalities in different organizations and institutions. (Hofstede, 2011) The PDI of China is considerably high, meaning there is “ high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society” (Patent, 2009). In social terms, this means that authority figures such as the father of a family are given utmost respect. Furthermore, in all situations, one must address a person by their title in order to give them the respect of their status.

This is also reflected in a business atmosphere, where hierarchies are clearly defined. Those on top of the hierarchy are respected, and unquestionably obeyed by those lower in the hierarchy, who are given clear instructions of what is to be expected of them. (Patent, 2009) There is a limited level of communications between these different levels. This is a fact that is prevalent and accepted all throughout Chinese society. On the other hand, the PDI of the United States is very low, and almost leans toward egalitarianism. This is indicative of a greater equality between societal levels,

including government, organizations, and even within families. “ (Hofstede, 2011) Socially, Americans are more comfortable around one another, regardless of their ranking. This is reflected in social life, where there is much lower emphasis on titles and qualifications. It is apparent in day-to-day dealings in which Americans greet each other by shaking hands and often call each other by first names, regardless of the person’s title.

In a business context, leaders may be respected, but more so for their abilities and success rather than their positioning in the hierarchy. (Patent, 2009) They often take on the role of mentors with whom employees are unafraid and motivated to work with. “ Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. “ (Hofstede, 2011) China is a highly collectivist culture, where all individuals are part of the unit, with the most fundamental unit being that of family.

The prosperity of these units is ultimately more important than that of individual persons. Collectivism is apparent in all parts of life, from the attention given to group behavior more than individual behavior, to small everyday activities such as crowding on to a bus with numerous other passengers, such as seen in bustling Chinese cities such as Shanghai. (Gallo, 2009) These beliefs stem from the Confucian values of “ harmony, strong interpersonal relationships and group loyalties. ” (Fitzgerald, 2002) Loyalty to relationships is emphasized, even in a business context.

For this reason, employees are dedicated to the company they work with, and in turn they are treated with the same loyalty, transforming the

business environment into a somewhat family environment. (Gallo, 2009) Also in business, every employee regards himself as part of team, and all his efforts are solely to work towards the success of that team. Collectivism in Chinese culture can be summed up in one term 'guan xi', which can be loosely translated to mean "to concern, to relate, to make connections, to make relationships'. (Fitzgerald, 2002) The United States, on the other hand, is a highly individualistic society. Every individual is looking for 'the American dream', a better state than they presently are in (Cultural, n. d. ). Individuals believe in working hard and performing well for one's own benefits, and relationships and group culture is one of less importance than the concept of "I" (Kwintessential, 2011). This is prevalent from childhood, when children are taught the worth of being independent and self-reliant. (Fitzgerald, 2002) This is a common element of American society: it is accepted and rewarded. The same goes for the attitudes seen in a business environment. There is a lesser concept of teams, and a higher concept of individuals working hard for their own success rather than for that of a larger unit's. Likewise, individual high performers in a company are rewarded for their efforts. (Gallo, 2009) "Long-term oriented societies foster pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular saving, persistence, and adapting to changing circumstances. (Hofstede, 2011) According to Hofstede's analysis, China is a country that is very long term oriented, with a high factor of 118. This is one of the most commonly seen values in Chinese society, and is founded upon the teaching of Confucian, which are engrained in the Chinese culture. They are seen in everyday behavior: the Chinese are always looking to a better future and working towards this through the saving of money, perseverance,

and the ability to adapt to changes surrounding them. (itim International, n. d) For example, Chinese sellers are infamous for their bargaining abilities.

Another value of this long-term orientation society is to have a sense of shame, which is why Chinese people always remain highly composed and respectful no matter the situation. (nwlink, 1997) This composure is further complimented by their hard work and determination in business-matters. They believe that the future matters more than the present or past, and therefore put all their potential into working for better things to come. “ Short-term oriented societies foster virtues related to the past and present such as national pride, respect for tradition, preservation of " face", and fulfilling social obligations. (Hofstede, 2011) The USA comes in with a relatively low LTO factor at only 29. Short term oriented societies are concerned with the Truth of matters, which Americans view as science, religion and management. Following the same values, they believe that the truth may be manipulated in order to obtain the desired results. (nwlink, 1997) As Americans are extremely concerned about personal solidity, these values about truth tie in well with both their social and business lives. In social lives, Americans are very protective of themselves and their ‘ face’ or reputation as they are in business life.

Having looked at Hofstede’s differences in the cultural dimensions between China and America, we can now take a look at these differences from a different perspective. Trompenaars, who was also Dutch, was a professional in cross-cultural communication and drew up a model of culture with seven dimensions. This essay will pay particular focus to the dimension of

universalism and particularism in USA and China. Particularist societies such as that in China are those societies in which people believe that a clear and right decision can be made on the grounds of the relationships and the situation it is based on.

It may be said, " Particularism is based on logic of the heart and humanfriendship. " (Cultures, 2011) For this reason, Chinese people believe in the value of all relationships and they make the required effort to base these relationships on a strong foundation for a long lasting outcome. The Chinese are known for being good hosts, and often participate in small gestures, such as giving gifts. In businesses as well, the Chinese try to build a relationship with the person they are doing dealings with.

They like to take their time in business dealings and negotiations, rely on a mutual trust and respect to get the process finished, and believe in the simplicity of such dealings. (Cultures, 2011) In Universalist societies " There is a belief that what is good or true can be discovered, defined, and applied to every situation" (cyborlink, 2011) . These societies, such as that of the USA take a universal point of view and believe that all matters are relative. Socially, they are okay with having weak relationships with friends or family members.

But this universalism can really be seen in a business aspect, as Americans are very concerned with terms and conditions and contracts; basically, the little details entailed in a business dealing. They are usually even lawyers involved in seeing to a smooth running of the matter, and this is reflected in the fact that there are more lawyers per person in the USA than anywhere

else in the world. (Cultures, 2011) After looking at these four cultural dimensions and the differences they show between China and America, a great deal of understanding may be acquired in why these countries work in the way they do.

The next part of this essay will apply this understand in a Tourism and Hospitality context: it will provide recommendations for the Industry in America on how it could welcome and deal with Chinese guests. As well have already seen, the Chinese are loyal, hardworking people who give great importance to status, relationships, and the future. In order to give them a satisfying and pleasurable experience in the USA, American hotel and tourism managers must reciprocate these values. Because China is not, per se, a religiously founded country, there are not many strict dietary restrictions or other practices that the Chinese people follow.

This makes it easier for the American hosts to welcome their guests, as the only alterations they really need to make is that in their behavior and attitude in order to fit with the personal value system of the Chinese. During their stay at a hotel, Chinese guests must be treated in the same way that they would treat guests in their country. They should be welcomed graciously, and perhaps given a small gift as a token of appreciation for their arrival and as a gesture that implies the beginning of a beautiful relationship. Too much eye contact should be avoided as the Chinese may misconstrue this as being rude.

What's more, Chinese guests should always be addressed by their title, and although friendliness is appreciated, an overly boisterous or excited manner



may be considered as not being genuine. To make their stay more comfortable, Chinese guests should be given their privacy in room that have all the amenities required, but they should have the knowledge that they are always being accommodated and that if they need anything, it would be at their doorstep in a moment's time. For families, there should be a range of activities so that the guests know that their hosts, too, understand the importance of family and relationships.

On departure, the guests should be given personal attention by hotel staff members and should be asked about their trip and their stay in the hotel. They should be aware that they will be welcomed back at any point of time with the same hospitality and that in staying with the American hotel, not only has a business dealing been made but a long lasting relationship has been established. It is important that the guests feel like their stay has been a worthwhile investment of their money and time. For the tourism industry to be more adaptable to Chinese guests, there are numerous things they could do.

As with the hotel industry, they must approach the guests in a respectful manner and be able to make them feel comfortable, content and confident in the investment of their money and time. Due to the collectivist nature of the Chinese people and because their Confucian values urge them to seek constant knowledge and education, informational group activities would be perfect for Chinese guests. For example, if in New York, a group tour that takes the tourists to all the important landmarks and locations, such as the

Statue of Liberty, whilst providing an interesting and educational background will be very pleasing for the guests.

As will events that provide an opportunity for Chinese tourists to meet with others, communicate and enjoy what may be the start of a great relationship. Such events may be organized dinners, cruise trips, exhibitions and so on. There should also be a large range of family activities, such as trips to theme parks. As long as the Chinese are given an entertaining and informational environment to enjoy their trip, they should be very satisfied and looking forward to come back for more.

In conclusion, the work and findings of Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars has given us a thoroughly insightful look into the vastly different cultures of China and America: in both a social context and in a business context. It is incredible and inspiring to see how much this information can help individuals and professionals to act and interact with people from other societies, and how it can be applied in a range of different areas, such as in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry. Truly, such information provides us with an “ edge of understanding” (itim International, n. ) by which only more and more successful cross-cultural interactions can be expected in the future. REFERENCES: Bing, J. W. (2004, February). Hofstede's consequences: The impact of his work on consulting and business practices. Retrieved May 28, 2011, from ITAP International: <http://www.itapintl.com/facultyandresources/articlelibrarymain/hofstedes-consequences-the-impact-of-his-work-on-consulting-and-business-practices>.

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