

culture. They are at the very core of the system of interpersonal relationships and often the key to making a hierarchical and bureaucratic system work. Personal relationships may extend over several levels, including family and friends, *danwei* colleagues and associates, schoolmates and casual acquaintances.

Canadian use of the term “face” is much more restrictive than Chinese use. We are concerned about not “looking bad.” In Canada, it is the individual’s responsibility for his or her own well-being. In China, however, the face of the individual is a collective responsibility, and face can be given or taken away.

To lose face, or to cause another to lose face, is a very serious concern. As a result, any form of direct confrontation leading to the emergence of winners and losers must be avoided whenever possible, even though it may require one to be evasive or ambiguous. Fear of losing face can make Chinese people very sensitive to insult.

Face is given when indebtedness is honoured. It is important for a Chinese person to build up and maintain face in order to shape a powerful and influential image. The more important one appears to be, the more likely one’s requests will be granted. On the other hand, people go to elaborate

lengths to give face to others and prevent them from losing it. Giving face may mean offering gifts and lavish compliments or treating someone with great respect, for example, by using a title such as *Lao*.

Foreigners will be forgiven for not understanding the social conventions related to face. If your views and inclinations differ from your colleagues, be consistent in your message and make sure you communicate why you feel as you do. Don’t get shammed into doing something you strongly oppose because someone has told you your decision will cause them to lose face. It is important our partners understand why Canadians might hold a particular view, and how that view may be valued in our society. After all, this is part of a successful exchange. That said, learn to let the little things go and avoid situations that might embarrass your partner. Embarrassing a Chinese person in public can lead to retribution. They might not get angry, but they will get even.

For minor loss of face, a Chinese person will pretend it never happened. Go along with the pretence, but gradually try to improve your relationship by paying special attention to the offended person. In general, you should treat any face-losing situation seriously. According to Chinese tradition, you have both lost face and