

Chinese partners allowed her to come to her own conclusion and save face.

Cross-cultural experiences may best be enjoyed through relationships with Chinese people. Although Chinese people are generally less outgoing when it comes to meeting strangers than westerners, there will be many opportunities to make acquaintances and develop friendships. But understand, there are both cultural and official constraints that can affect contacts between Chinese people and foreigners.

Officially, westerners are perceived as a possible threat, a potential source of "spiritual pollution" leading to moral decadence. This attitude often restricts contact between Chinese people and foreigners. In your office or workplace, you may develop a very good rapport with your Chinese colleagues only to find it does not extend beyond general socializing. Of course, establishing friendships or personal relationships depends on a number of factors, but a limiting factor affecting your Chinese associates could be that they have been discouraged from "getting too close to the foreigner."

This official position does not represent the attitude of all Chinese people, many of whom seek contact with foreigners. It may not even prevent the development of warm, personal relationships between you and those who have been warned. Although close friendships with Chinese people may take time to develop, they will be a very important and rewarding part of your experience in China.

Recognize that culture determines attitudes and values. The way we perceive ourselves, our social roles and obligations, and the way we define and tackle problems are shaped by our own experience. If we recognize this, we are less likely to judge behaviour by Canadian standards and values. We can then develop strategies sensitive to the cultural context. If you can understand something about the values and motivations of your partners, you are much more likely to be successful.

Applying individual traits to a whole nation can be very misleading and descend into meaningless stereotyping. If it is done with care, however, it can provide a framework for understanding the values and beliefs that are widely shared in Chinese society.