

MISCONCEPTIONS IN UNDERSTANDING CHINESE PEOPLE

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Nowadays, China holds one of the first places among developing countries, and with the rapid development of China's economy, the interest to this country has been significantly increased. China's rise has created opportunities for global development, but at the same time imposed challenges to other countries in many regards. Its role in the global governance has been increasingly growing. It is almost impossible to solve any important global issues without China's participation. Thus, it is necessary for Western countries to learn and understand how to live and cooperate with this country. However, some misconceptions caused by a combination of distance, ignorance and arrogance were serious obstacles in a way of better understanding of China. In this regard, misperceptions about the Chinese world became an important step to understanding it better. China is a highly diverse country whose complexity calls for thorough analyses, diplomatic approaches and focused business strategies.

Firstly, when we speak about people it is not fair to generalize them as "Chinese people". The Chinese culture is quite diverse and it is different from north to south and east to west. And there are really no such notions as "Chinese people" or "Chinese language". There are Han Chinese - which are the main ethnic group and besides it 56 other groups compile the population of China. The common language of China is Mandarin Chinese, and every town and county in China have their own dialects completely different from each other.

Actually, people started to investigate China by learning Chinese language and the earliest Westerners who began to study the language and Chinese culture were Portuguese and Spanish missionaries in the 16th-century. They tried to spread Roman Catholicism among the Chinese people. Nonetheless, these studies did not go so far and China was the last place to be studied. This fact can be explained by some reasons, the first one is that China does not have any connections with the Bible, whereas Assyriology and Egyptology have, that is why they have developed more successfully.

Another reason is related to the distance. French orientalist set down the fundamental basis for the oriental studies by discovering East countries, in particular Middle East, taking into account the fact that Middle East is much closer than Far East, and China was also under their consideration. This region was mainly studied by American and Russian oriental schools. From the 18th-century the government of Russian Empire started to send embassies and expeditions to China with the main purpose to get to know better this mysterious country, its people, culture and language they use. To break down all stereotypes and misunderstandings that appeared towards this country.

In the course of this article, we would like to highlight and show how language of the Chinese people and faith could play a significant role in the development of Chinese character and also the most common stereotypes associated with the Chinese people and their explanations.

Chinese writing not only isolated Chinese people for 5000 years by creating enormous differences between China and the rest of the world, but also affected the way of thinking. Hieroglyphics is one of the main reason why Chinese education is fundamentally based on the rote memorization, lacking logic and analytical thinking. Since Chinese characters are not always constructed with vicious reasoning and the same logic methods cannot be applied in learning them. In order to read an ordinary newspaper written in Chinese language, it is obligated to know minimum 3000 of characters. This is an impressive number! Nevertheless, for reading and

understanding treatise written hundreds or thousands of years ago, the knowledge of 3000 – 5000 hieroglyphs will not be enough. In this case the number grows up to 20-30 thousand. Rote memorization from the early age suppresses curiosity, thirst for imagination and reasoning. Because of this Chinese people hardly ever make decisions in unusual situations, operate only in a rigidly defined.[1]

Chinese also avoid abstract concepts, expressing it by a combination of two specific notions. Take for example the word “size” which is in Chinese “大小”(daxiao) literally means "big-small", “length” is “长短”(changduan) i.e. "long - short". Also one prominent thing is that in Chinese language, there are no such equivalent endings as in "ness".

So, “happiness” in English means “the feeling of being happy”, whereas in Chinese there are three common concepts: “高兴”(gaoxing), “快乐”(kuaile), “幸福”(xingfu). The literal meaning of “gaoxing” is “high excitement” is often used to describe a temporary moment of happiness or excitement, “kuaile” is used to wish people to be happy in special occasions and festivals, while “xingfu” translated as “bless”. [2]

Thus, all Chinese words are very precise, as they try to express their mind simply and clearly.

Another trigger that affected Chinese character is Confucianism. It has a huge impact on Chinese culture, values, mentality. According to Confucius, obeying given roles is the way to achieve happiness. [3] It can be interpreted in “saving citizens from any kind of independence, both in thinking and behaviour”. May be that is the main reason why Chinese culture is poor for philosophical luminaries, since only Confucius is widely-known. The fact that Chinese people were always abiding political regime of despotic governors is another confirmation that they stick to concepts of Confucianism.

Moreover, the family was used as a basis for an ideal government and familial loyalty was highly appreciated. Even now Chinese attitude to family differ from Europeans’. For Chinese people “family” plays the most important role in their lives, it can be supposed that hieroglyph “好”(hao) i.e. “good” consists of two parts “daughter and son”, which explains the harmonious way of fitting Chinese characters (here: hieroglyphs) to Confucianism.

Western society is regarded to be more diverse, where people don't have so much personal connections. In contrast, personal relationships play a crucial role in Chinese society. In fact, everything can be achieved through personal connections. Because of this, many issues can be solved quite easily. However, it also is a major obstacle. [4] Chinese are highly sensitive towards someone's opinion, comparing to Europeans who are considered not to mind about what people think of them. As an illustration, the word “face” in Chinese means totally different from its meaning in English or other languages. “脸”(lian) i.e. “face” mainly has a meaning of reputation, personal dignity or public respect. Generally, the problem of reputation is common in West as well, however, comparing to China, this subject is still frequently discussed. It is interesting to note that the property of Chinese people to be self-independent has helped them to survive for thousand years.

Another common misconception is about China's policy, some Europeans think that China is still communist country. However, nowadays only the structure of the Chinese Communist Party reminds the tales of its communist past. China was a communist country from 1949 to 1976. It embraced capitalistic traits after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. Following its own way of success China is now becoming rather powerful country and it poised to become the largest economy on earth by 2030.

Understanding the term “humility” among Europeans and Chinese people can be evaluated as a misconception too. Humility is one common virtue that Confucius advocated in his teaching, saying that pride will led to destruction. The typical example of humility is demonstrated in the way that Chinese people host their guests. Although being well prepared for hosting, they will apologize for the ill-preparation and small quantity of food.

The tendency to introversion manifested the Chinese on a variety of levels, from the personal to the public. Chinese people often consider showing emotions as impolite behaviour. More than

that, they replace it by a complex set of ethical rituals, that may be seen as hypocrisy in the eyes of Europeans.

If one person meets another, both should show deep respect to each other. Everyone is obliged to display that they believe that another person is developed and educated, even if they are well aware that this is not true. The modesty is also shown when the Chinese accept compliments, responding with “哪里哪里” (Nali, nali) meaning, “I didn’t deserve your compliment.”

Sometimes Europeans see Chinese people as indifferent, and here we would like to quote Lin Yutang “they are still more justly famous for their indifference. This, again, we believe, is a product of social environment. There is no more significant contrast than that between the parting instruction of Tom Brown's mother in the English classic Tom Browns School Days to "hold his head high and answer straight" and the traditional parting instruction of the Chinese mother that her son should "not meddle with public affairs." This is due to the fact that in a society where legal protection is not given to personal rights, indifference is always safe and has an attractive side to it difficult for Westerners to appreciate.” [5]

Europeans visiting China, always come up with the idea, that Chinese society lacks the feelings of social and civic responsibility. Chinese people are littering even in public places, without thinking about consequences. A common Chinese thought is that littering keeps people employed, and they are simply trying not to interlope. In Confucianism we can observe transition from family “家” (jia) to government “国” (guo), where the society is presented as “国家”. In actual fact, the concept of collectivism does not exist in Chinese culture. Even Chinese games show their individuality, preferring games where they have to play on their own.

For many years, prevailing myths in our view of China as an aggressive and ignorant neighbour harmed to the normal cooperation with China. Who knows, maybe if we had then soberly assessed China, our relationships would be much stronger now. Nowadays, however, other new myths replaced old ones, which is considered equally harmful. We still do not understand that the era of China has returned, and what place we would take in it - resource appendage, junior or equal partner, that depends on our actions now.

To summarize, we understand that there are always exceptions, and there will be extremely individualistic people. However, as we mentioned before, the aim of this article was not to generalize all Chinese people, as we understand their distinct features, but to show the picture of Chinese person as a whole nation.

Before making some decisions about their mentality, we should carefully study the history of the nation, since it affected the way of life, in terms of forming some peculiarities that were mentioned earlier. Chinese history accounts 5000 years. Moreover, during this period 12 completely different dynasties changed by leaving significant marks on Chinese mentality. That is the reason why it is irrational to make hasty generalizations without knowing aspects of China's history.

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РОЛЬ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ