

# *IBI Quarterly*

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**Dear Reader,**

Just in time for the Chinese New Year – Sunday, 29 January – we are happy to make available our first IBI Quarterly of 2006. Tao Yue, Chinese relationship manager and network partner of IBI, connects her impressions of a recent visit to her hometown Shanghai with some key elements of Chinese culture that still affect the way business is conducted there.

Throughout the year, we will focus on specific countries, their cultures and recent developments with contributions from IBI Network Partners:

***IBI Quarterly April***

Iris Kuhnert will bring you up to date on what is happening Japan.

***IBI Quarterly September***

Ann Means and Lina Bilkha will capture recent developments in India.

***IBI Quarterly December***

Pawel Walentynowicz will give you first-hand insights into what is happening in Poland.

We wish you interesting reading and above all: a Happy New Year and fresh beginnings!

**Ursula Brinkmann, Ph.D.**

**Intercultural Business Improvement**

## China Impressions

### Tao Yue

China changes fast. Even to me, a native Chinese who goes home every year, it seems different each visit. Shanghai traffic is breathless, its people are restless. Working from nine to nine plus Saturday is normal. The city is hectic and pushy. You must seize every chance to move ahead – in traffic, on sidewalks, in markets, at work, and while flagging a taxi. If you don't, others immediately jump in front of you. Civility and gentility don't pay off here.

Even though social changes are gigantic, Chinese culture changes little. Chinese life, no matter where, is built around meals. The standard office lunch break in China is an hour. A Dutch company allows only half an hour, but its Chinese employees take 45 minutes anyhow. They'd rather stay in the office late than sacrifice a warm lunch. Business meals are still the most important network and negotiation site. You cannot expect a serious meeting without a serious meal. Business travel in China can be exhausting because of banquets. In North China, you need to prepare for alcohol as well – even many Chinese are scared of it.

Hierarchy still persists in China. The person of highest rank is expected to be the center of attention at meals, especially if he is also the eldest. He should sit at the place of honor next to his business counterpart of similar rank. He should be the first to taste each dish brought to the table and to receive toasts. Chinese managers often bring their assistants to important meetings and sometimes boss them around.

While this attitude may upset many Westerners, Chinese assistants take it for granted because of reciprocity – bringing the junior to an important meeting means taking him seriously and giving him the chance to observe and practice. The junior knows this and treasures the opportunity.

Chinese people clearly distinguish between host and guest. The host orders the food, pays the bill, and decides whom to invite. The guest shows up, praises the food, and is sensitive to the host's wishes. No meal is really free. Usually the home team is host and the visiting team is guest, unless the visiting team announces well in advance that they will treat and the home team agrees.

Chinese people also sharply distinguish between public and private. They treat people they know (family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, business partners, bosses, and customers) with courtesy, but they hardly acknowledge the existence of strangers. They take good care of their home, but are often less careful with public property, which may explain why Chinese public toilets are often unpleasant.

Family is still the cornerstone of society. Most Chinese people are “amoral familists,” pragmatic and cunning. They eagerly pursue family interests, but are indifferent to others outside their immediate circle. They don't like interference from the government or other people. They also teach themselves and warn their children not to meddle in other people's business. They take full advantage of convenient rules and evade inconvenient ones. China is an anarchic society, and it is wrong to suppose that



it is a police state because it has an authoritarian government.

Though prone to evade rules and regulations, Chinese people maintain social order. To understand how society functions, just observe urban traffic from a hotel window. Cars don't move in straight lines; they zigzag. Traffic has its pattern, wiggling like a snake. Each car tries to avoid collisions while pushing relentlessly ahead. Drivers are aggressive yet flexible – much like people in general. Thanks to this mindset, the largest population in the world maintains social order with much less government intervention than Westerners would expect.

To succeed in China, business people need to understand both the dining etiquette of Chinese business partners and the self-organizing logic of Chinese society.

To find out more about our China program, please contact Tao Yue at [info@ibinet.nl](mailto:info@ibinet.nl).

## **What makes IBI special**

The Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC), a valid and reliable self-assessment tool. More than 5,000 people, all working in an international context, have filled in the IRC. This makes the IRC database one of the world's largest sources of information on intercultural competences. In just three years, we have built a world-wide network of 75 IRC Licensees.

IBI has developed a unique approach for coaching expatriates and their partners, integrating in-depth assessment, coaching and country-briefings to make your investment pay off.

We have created a tight network of seasoned intercultural professionals that support you in doing business in four economically vital regions: Asia, North America, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Frequent exchange and supervision ensure the high quality of our services.

IBI cooperates with researchers specialized in analyzing large databases for continuous quality checks of the IRC questionnaire within a changing world and globalizing business.

IBI stands out with its partnerships of specialists to cover the strategic, operational and personal challenges of your work in an international environment.

If you want to find out more about how we can support you in strengthening the intercultural competences of your staff, please contact Ursula Brinkmann, Ph.D., at [ursula@ibinet.nl](mailto:ursula@ibinet.nl). We look forward to speaking with you.

