China (People’s Republic of)

- The Western custom of shaking hands is spreading rapidly and is now probably the customary form of greeting, but often a nod or slight bow is sufficient. Don’t be upset, though, if the Chinese do not smile when being introduced; this is rooted more in the Chinese attitude of keeping feelings inside rather than displaying them openly.
- Business cards are often exchanged, and yours should be printed in your own and in the Chinese language. Also, it is more respectful to present your card—or a gift or any other article—using both hands.
- Hugging and kissing when greeting are uncommon.
- Generally speaking, the Chinese are not a touch-oriented society. This is especially true for visitors. So avoid touching or any prolonged form of body contact.
- Public displays of affection are very rare. On the other hand, you may note people of the same sex walking hand-in-hand, which is simply a gesture of friendship.
- Avoid being physically demonstrative, especially with older or more senior people.
- Posture is important, so don’t slouch or put your feet on desks or chairs. Also, avoid using your feet to gesture or move around.
- Personal space is much less in China. This means when conversing, the Chinese will stand much closer than Westerners. This often results in Westerners moving backward, with the Chinese following along in something of an unintentional “pet de deux.”
- The Chinese are enthusiastic applauders, so don’t be surprised if you are greeted with group clapping, even by small children. When a person is applauded in this fashion it is the custom for that person to return the applause.
- A distinctive Chinese (and Japanese) action is to suck air in quickly and audibly through the lips and teeth. This is a common reaction when something surprising or difficult is prepored or requested. If this reaction is given, it wouldn’t be best to modify your request rather than risk having your Chinese counterpart face the highly embarrassing (for them) situation of having to say “no.”
- When walking in public places, direct eye contact and staring is not common in the larger cities, especially in those areas accustomed to foreign visitors. However, in smaller communities, visitors may be the subject of much curiosity and therefore you may notice some staring, especially if you are blond or red-headed.
- Silence can be a virtue in China, so don’t be dismayed if there are periods of silence in your dinner or business conversations. It is a sign of politeness and contemplation. During conversations, be especially careful about interrupting.

- Don’t begin eating until the host picks up his or her chopsticks.
- It is the Chinese way to decline gifts or other offerings two or even three times, even when they want to accept, as a matter of etiquette.
- Seating arrangements are important, whether at business meetings or while dining. At meetings, the chief guest is always seated at the “head of the room,” facing the door, the host with his or her back to the door. While dining, the guest sits to the left of the host.
- Before taking any photographs of local people, ask their permission.
- If you wish to smoke, offer your cigarettes to those around you. Chinese women rarely smoke, however. If you object to others smoking in your presence, this may pose a difficult situation since smoking areas are uncommon in China. If this is extremely important to you, one gambit is to explain to your host that you are allergic to cigarette smoke.
- The open hand is used for pointing (not one finger).
- To beckon someone, the palm faces downward and the fingers are moved in a scratching motion.
- On public streets, spitting and blowing the nose without the benefit of a handkerchief is fairly common, although the government is waging a campaign to reduce this. It is regarded as ridding the body of a waste and is therefore considered an act of personal hygiene.

Dining revolves around the use of chopsticks. Just watch your host for tips and techniques. Here are some finer points:

- With wooden chopsticks, you may see the Chinese first rub them together before eating. This is merely a way of removing any possible splinters. But, if you are a guest, it is impolite to do this because it suggests you have been given cheap, rough chopsticks.
- Even though there will be communal dishes of food, don’t take your portions with the ends of the chopsticks you have put in your mouth. Either your host will place food on your plate, or a separate pair of “serving” chopsticks will be near the serving dish.
- Don’t stick your chopsticks upright in your rice. Among some Chinese this is a superstitious act that could bring bad luck. In some areas placing chopsticks in rice in this fashion is done as an offering to the dead.
- Don’t worry if you drop a chopstick on the floor. Some Chinese believe this means you will get an invitation to dinner.
- Don’t suck on your chopsticks.
- To eat large pieces of food (when a knife is not available for cutting), it is perfectly acceptable to lift the morsel to your mouth with the chopsticks and bite off a piece.
- When you are finished eating, place your chopsticks in parallel across your dish or bowl.
- The Chinese will hold bowls of food directly under their lower lip and use the chopsticks to push the food into their mouths. When eating long, slippery noodles it is perfectly acceptable to place one end in your mouth and slurp or suck up the remainder.

- Refusing food may be considered impolite. If you don’t wish to eat it, just poke it around and move it to the side of your dish.
- Bones are often placed directly on the table alongside your dish.
- Toothpicks are commonly available and used during and after a Chinese meal. Just be certain to cover your mouth with the other hand while poking and picking.
- Offering toast is common in China and is a relatively simple and uninvolved act: just raise your glass, look at your host and those around him, nod, and drink. You may also say Kan-pie, which means “bottoms up,” and some Chinese will actually invert the glass “bottom up” to show they have finished the whole drink.
- Don’t worry about a bit of pushing and shoving in stores or when groups board public buses or trains. Apologies are neither offered or expected.
- Most of the more popular gestures discussed in Chapter 2 will be familiar to the Chinese. However, many Chinese will not recognize the “O.K.” sign; instead, the “thumbs up” signal is known and means “Everything is O.K.” When beckoning, the curling inward of the index finger is not used in China.
A firm handshake, accompanied by direct eye contact, is the standard greeting in the United States. Occasionally, among very good friends who have not seen each other for long intervals, women may briefly hug other women, and men may quickly kiss the cheek of a woman. Males rarely hug one another, however. Occasionally, men may shake hands with the left hand either covering the handshake or lightly gripping the forearm. This represents a higher degree of warmth and friendship, and politicians may be seen using this technique when campaigning.

According to anthropologists, Americans tend to stand just about one arm's length away from each other while conversing or standing in public. It's called "the comfort zone."

In the past decade, much emphasis has been placed on sexual equality in the workplace. While many women still enjoy having men open doors for them, help them get seated, and give up seats in public transportation, there are some women who object to such deference.

Speaking of exceptions, because the United States has such ethnic diversity, visitors may also occasionally observe people greeting each other with hugs and cheek-kissing. Certain nationalities have brought these customs to the United States and continue to practice them, but they are not in wide use.

Probably the only circumstance where two men may be seen walking in public and holding hands is if they are openly homosexual.

Direct eye contact in both social and business situations is very important. Not doing so implies boredom or disinterest.

Americans generally respect queues or lines in public situations and will form lines in an orderly fashion. To shove or push one's way into such a line will probably generate both anger and verbal complaints.

There are two well-known rude and insulting gestures in the United States. Both are recognized in all parts of America. They are:

— The middle finger thrust.
— The forearm jerk.

Waving "hello" or "goodbye" is done by extending the arm, palm facing down, and waving the hand up and down at the wrist joint. Another variation is to raise the arm, palm outward, and move the whole arm and hand back and forth like an upside-down pendulum. This may be important to know because in many other countries this is a signal for "no."

Many Americans become uncomfortable with periods of silence. Therefore in business or social situations, if a gap occurs they will quickly try to fill in with conversation.

Winking in America can signal diverse messages: flirtation, friendliness, amusement, or to signal "I am just kidding."

When driving, automobiles are equipped with flashing lights as turning signals. If these are not operating, or if cyclists wish to signal for a turn, the proper procedure is as follows: extending the left arm straight out of the driver's window means "I plan to turn to the left," but if the arm is bent upward it signals "I plan to turn to the right."

Beckoning can be done by either raising the index finger and repeatedly curling it in and out, or by raising the hand (palm facing inward) and waggling the fingers back toward the body. Either is acceptable.

To call a waiter, just raise one hand to head level or above. To signal that you want the check, make a writing motion with two hands (one hand representing the paper, the other making a writing motion).

When dining, many Americans are taught to keep the left hand in their lap and eat with the right hand. It is permissible to sit at a table with both wrists resting lightly on the table. When engaged in deep, close conversation, two people might even lean forward, with elbows on the table, but strict practitioners of etiquette in America frown on this.

It is considered impolite to use toothpicks in front of other people.

It has become an important courtesy in the United States to ask permission of your host or hostess before smoking.

Using the hand and index finger to point at objects or to point directions is perfectly common and acceptable.

Two popular sports in the United States are baseball and football. Both have a special set of unique signals used by the officials—called umpires and referees, respectively—to indicate to onlookers what is happening on the playing field. A spectator can usually find the explanation for each of these signals in the printed program sold at such sporting events.

To signal across a distance that "You have a telephone call," Americans will usually point at the person and then hold the other hand up to the jaw and mouth as if holding a telephone receiver.

Whistling is common, either as a method for calling or to indicate to someone at a distance, as an accompaniment to applause or cheering, or as a form of personal entertainment. Whistling is not intended as a form of rocal derision as it is, say, in Europe. In the United States, crowds voice disapproval by shouting out the word "Booowoo!"

If an American is seen holding both hands to the throat, this is the signal for "I am choking." It might be seen, for instance, in sporting events as a sarcastic signal that someone is showing tension and playing poorly. But it can be used in a far more serious situation. Health experts in the United States are urging people to use—and to recognize—this gesture if and when a person is choking on a piece of food. In such a situation, the person cannot talk and is signaling "Help!"

Mothers will scold children by shaking an index finger at them. People will admire children by patting them on the top of the head.

One commonly used hand gesture for signaling "no" is to wave the forefinger and hand (palm outward) in front and across the upper body, back and forth.

Another popular gesture illustrated in Chapter 2, such as the "O.K." sign, "V for victory" and "thumbs up," are all very popular and well-known throughout the United States. The "hook 'em horns" gesture is known and used in the state of Texas. The "hang loose" gesture is known and used in the state of Hawaii, but not generally known in the other 49 states of the United States.