

## INTERNATIONAL TOUR AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION — A STUDY OF CHINESE TOURISTS' BAD BEHAVIORS

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### ABSTRACT

*An international tour is a channel of intercultural communication. People from different cultural setting can easily communicate with each other and understand each other, so as to improve friendship and build up a good image of a nation. Therefore, tourists' behaviors are an important factor in intercultural communication. Due to this reason, the author takes some cases which happened with Chinese people in recent years as an example, and then further analyzes the cases from a perspective of intercultural communication. Finally, the author gives some suggestions about how to improve Chinese behavior in international tour such as educating Chinese tourists' awareness of civilized manners, learning some fundamental cultural knowledge of different countries and training etiquette skills for Chinese international tour. In this way, well-educated and civilized Chinese tourists would really promote a good image of Chinese people and nation in the world.*

**Key words:** international tour, intercultural communication, civilized manner, Chinese tourist, Chinese people, national image

### INTRODUCTION

The development of communication and transportation technology and numerous social and cultural revolutions over the last decades have been globalizing the world into a closely interconnected society. The flux and complexity of the change will continue to increase in the years ahead and challenge the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on which modern people have learned to live with. (Chen, 2010). Thus, nobody can stay away from the society and live alone. That means we have to set up a certain type of relationship with people around as wherever we are. So whether our behaviors are proper or not can definitely affect those around you. People behavior may create a pleasant atmosphere while rude behaviors are likely to commit offences. A person who displays proper manners in public place not only feels good about himself, he also makes those around him feel respected and pleased. (Ou, 2008)

Especially, an international tour is a way of intercultural communication among different cultures. The international tour can help different people to get understanding better and learn from each other. Also, it is a new cultural experience for people from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it is very necessary for any people to have a good behavior in international tour.

In recent years, with more and more Chinese tourists traveling abroad, some Chinese citizens' bad habits have severely damaged China's image as a nation of etiquette, other countries are becoming increasingly uncomfortable when confronting Chinese tourists' bad behavior and causing huge concern and criticism from both home and abroad. (Zhang, 2006)

In 2012, Chinese overlook Americans and Germans as the world's top international tourism spenders, with 83 million people spending a record US\$102 billion on international tourism.(Cripps, 2013)

Therefore, the author takes some cases as an example, and analyses the cases from a perspective of intercultural communication. Finally, the author will give some suggestions about how to improve Chinese behavior in international tour, so as to facilitate Chinese tourists to build up a good image and to better communicate with people with different cultural backgrounds.

## **SOME CASES**

### **Defacing the ancient temple in Egypt**

Luxor Temple is a 3,500 year-old cultural relic in Egypt. On May 25, 2013, the vandal carved Ding Jinhao was here in Chinese. Later, it was reported on weibo, China microblog site. It was etched across the torso of the figure in the sculpture of the Temple. Soon, it was found that a Chinese tourist who is a 15-year-old student from a high school in Nanjing, has done such a graffiti. The Chinese student probably thought that carving his name on an ancient historical relic was simply something cool to do.

After reporting about the incident, the Chinese student's parents made an apology for what their son did in Egypt. Meanwhile, the parents expressed hope that people would show tolerance to their son, and that his future education and life aren't affected by the incident (eChinacities, 2013).

In a state-run Xinhua media report, one of the agency's photographers said local Egyptian staff had worked to try and clean the sculpture. While there was some improvement, the graffiti could not totally removed (Wong, 2013).

### **Throwing cigarette boxes into the sea in the Republic of Palau**

In February this year, one of the famous movie stars, Huang Bo wrote an article about his holiday in Palau which is one of the Pacific island nations on Weibo. He said that he was shocked to see many cigarette boxes in the water when he was diving. While seeing "Zhang Hua" Chinese characters on the cigarette boxes ("Zhong Hua" cigarette is one of the well-known brands of cigarettes in China), he felt very shameful for some Chinese tourists' behavior, and also told the others how embarrassing it was for China at that time.

### **Soaking their feet in the fountain outside the Louvre Museum in Paris**

It may be frowned upon by some, but enjoying and playing with a water fountain on a hot summer day is common and acceptable in France.

But a recent photo of Chinese tourists soaking their feet in the fountain outside the Louvre Museum in Paris has sparked heated debate in China on whether the image of Chinese tourists has been deteriorating.

The picture was widely circulated online and was picked up by number of Chinese news outlets across the country with sensational title such as "Foreigners astonished as Chinese have foot spa in Louvre fountain" ( Li, 2013)

## **Chinese graffiti on London's St. Paul's Cathedral**

Guo'an is one of the famous football clubs in China and is in Peking. Guo'an won champions for many times during China's football matches. Many Chinese football fans like the Guo'an club and really enjoy watching its football matches very much.

Bai Yangsong, a famous TV chief broadcaster paid a visit to St. Paul's Cathedral before the 2012 London Olympics. When he walked around the cathedral's cloisters, Bai Yangsong found out a line of Chinese graffiti that said "Guo'an are the champions". Instead of denouncing the act, Mr. Bai Yangsong made a joke, if people carry on doing things like this then this place will turn into an appreciation club for the Chinese Super League. Seeing these words right before the London Olympics was pretty funny.

## **ANALYSIS**

When speaking of the development of culture in the human race, this can be understood as the development of a common system of meaningful signs which enable us to perceive, interpret and treat each other and our surroundings in a certain manner. This manner will thus be in accordance with what one's own society accepts and understands (Thomas, 2010).

Meanwhile, each society has a particular set of social norms consisting of more or less explicit rules that prescribe a certain behavior, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context. A positive evaluation (politeness) arises when an action is in congruence with the norm, a negative evaluation (impoliteness – rudeness) when action is to the contrary (Fraser, 1990).

It goes without saying that etiquette is heavily dependent on culture; what is excellent etiquette in one society may be a shock in another. Etiquette evolves with culture. Etiquette can vary widely between different cultures and nations.

Mainstream thought about the ideal society of China is contained in the theories of Confucius. For Confucius, a world of great harmony would be a society made up of many individuals acting rationally organized around a series of societal orders. Etiquette and benevolence are integral to the social theories of Confucius. Confucius taught that a set of orders and norms must be established. From the top ruler, to his ministers, to fathers and to sons, everyone must behave in a manner appropriate to his position and follow an ordained set of rules and guidelines (Fan and Yu, 2011).

In addition, the Chinese word for etiquette, *li*, which originally meant, "to sacrifice," refers to the fact that following legally sanctioned etiquette required extraordinary sacrifices, not to mention detailed knowledge of hundreds of correct forms of behavior. Training in this highly prescribed way of living was so thorough, so pervasive, that people were judged first, last, and sometimes always on how closely they followed these rules of behavior. Etiquette came to be equated not only with learning in general, but also with culture and morality (Davis, 2010).

In contrast, western culture, or rather European and American culture, originates from two ancient cultures: Hellenistic culture and the Hebraic culture. These two cultures are quite different in their spiritual outlook and material embodiment. But, Western history is the continuation of the interaction and balancing of these two cultures (Fan, 2011).

Generally speaking, the word “etiquette” originated in France during the 1600s and 1700s. It was to mean “keep off the grass” in French. Louis XIV’s gardener noticed that the aristocrats were walking through the king’s gardens, so he put up signs, or etiquettes, to ward them off. However, the dukes and duchesses still walked right past these signs. Due to this blatant disregard, the king of Versailles decreed that no individual was to go beyond the bounds of the etiquettes. The meaning of etiquette would later include the ticket to a court that listed the rules on where a person would stand and what was to be done. This code of proper social behavior was eventually adopted by the upper class throughout the western world (Shi, 2012).

In most Western countries, people mainly focus on the etiquette both at home and abroad. Actually, there are a lot of rules of the western etiquette that are now shared worldwide. At the same time, all interpersonal relationships are guided by widely accepted rules of what is and is not appropriate behavior not only in international tour and but also in various social communication including intercultural communication. No doubt, etiquette, courtesy and good manners are simply methods of polishing self-conduct to obtain positive results.

Just as Aristotle said: if we have to consider the question whether a speech or a deed is good or not good, we should take into account not only the absolute circumstances to the speaker or doer – whom he addressed and when, and in whose interest and with what purpose, e.g. to secure a greater good or avert a greater evil (Aristotle, 2001).

## **SUGGESTIONS**

We have analyzed the different cultural values and virtues between China and Western countries. It is not difficult for us to know that Chinese tourists brought shame on themselves from the above cases, and also tarnished the image of the Chinese people and nation. Thus, any well-educated and civilized tourists should know how to understand the cultural values and virtues both from home and abroad or the other special expressive and communicative ways in foreign countries and learn how to put themselves into the shoes of others and how to consciously obey and follow different rules of etiquette and the public from different countries when doing any social behaviors and attitudes in international tours.

### **Educating the Chinese tourists’ awareness of civilized manners**

With 5,000 years of civilization, China is supposed to have a culture that values courtesy and propriety. In these latest incidents of Chinese tourists’ bad behaviors, the blame apparently falls on a lack of education both in the home and at school about the basic virtue of propriety, right behavior, honesty and possessing a sense of shame (Zhu, 2012).

Therefore, cultivation is narrowly understood by many as merely being instruction in useful techniques and knowledge, rather than the cultivation of sound and civilized character. The relative department media of the Chinese government should educate tourists what is right and what is wrong in their international tour and then they can make up their own minds in international tour. Only in this way, the Chinese tourists always have the ability to tell right from wrong due to cultivation of civilized character.

Recently, China Central Television (CCTV) has aired educational clips aimed at promoting polite tourist behavior. The unusual move by CCTV is one of many indications of the country’s efforts to reverse unfavorable stereotypes of Chinese tourists and improve the tarnished national image (Xinhua, 2013).

A recent call from a top party publicity official for measures to improve the behavior of Chinese tourists overseas has once again put the long-controversial image of our outbound fellow citizens under public scrutiny (Editorial, 2013). At the same time, China International Travel Service also called for outbound tourists and tour guides to behave themselves overseas and show respect for local regulations and customs.

The tourists have civilized characters cultivation to help them develop, and can learn what it takes to have the charm and social graces of a true civilized tourists, so as to elevate the image of Chinese tourists and to receive good reputation.

### **Training of etiquette skills for Chinese international tour**

Etiquette is a set of practices and forms which are followed in a wide variety of situations; many people consider it to be general social behavior or a branch of decorum, which is a code that governs the expectations of social behavior, according to the contemporary conventional norm with a society, social class, or group (Zhang, 2008).

Due to the fact that the world seems to be shrinking in some ways, the necessity of respecting, observing and behaving in accordance with the etiquette of another country is of increasing importance. Any traveler need to know enough about the correct behavior of a particular country to not unintentionally offend its customs. Understanding the basics of etiquette and protocol, that is the type of behavior that others expect of you in international tour. Before international tour, every travel agency should teach tourists to know some basic etiquette rules for better travel abroad. Here are some tips for better etiquette in international tour.

- A.** During the flight, any traveler should resist crowding the door when lining up to board, do not bring any hot food on the plane, and pay more attention to a low volume in conversation with others.  
Security measures on a plane need to be strict in order to guarantee all passengers' personal safety. Failure to observe these measures may disrupt the flight schedule and could endanger lives. So always follow the flight attendants' instructions carefully (Xu, 2012).
- B.** In the hotel, any traveler should go to the desk of service center in a calmly paced manner when checking in or checking out, do not frequently interrupt each other by talking loudly at the lobby.  
Do not ignore "No Smoking" signs. In some Western countries, however, smoking in public buildings is strictly forbidden, or only permitted in restricted areas. Failure to comply with those rules can result in a financial penalty. Ask for permission before smoking in others' presence, especially if young children or babies are nearby, both in the hotel and outside.
- C.** In any scenery places or public places, any traveler should consciously protect cultural relics by not carving, doodling, climbing, or otherwise disturbing the display, and do not take photos where photos are not permitted.
- D.** Under no circumstances, traveler should not spit and litter on the floor when indoors or outdoors, not even in the bathroom. Not only can it contribute to spreading disease, but someone might slip and hurt themselves. Similar expectations apply to rubbish disposal. Meanwhile, vandalizing, jaywalking, and cutting queues are improper in any country.

### **Learning some fundamental cultural knowledge of different countries**

To some extent, the bad behavior or uncivilized behavior of Chinese tourists in international tour, is mainly caused by cultural differences, such as speaking aloud and laughing in public places. Learning how to respect and follow local traditions and customs should be the first lesson for Chinese tourists. Thus, every travel agency should offer a guide for every traveler to attach great attention to different cultural customs and some certain

rules traveler may not have noticed. For example, the general rule in most Western countries is to tip 10 percent of a restaurant bill, but you may refuse a tip if you are unhappy with the service you received. Beware, however, that doing so may cause offense. Also, some jobs may not be well paid, meaning that tips are an essential source of income. To confuse matters even further, tipping is not expected at all in some countries and offering them may even be impolite. Therefore, it is best to familiarize yourself with local customs before visiting a country.

No matter what cultural and social norms we follow at home, abiding by local laws, respecting local customs and religious practice should always be considered good manners and a necessity. Thus, everyone should have intercultural communication competence, which means that person has ability to communicate with or interact with other person with different cultural backgrounds. Cultural setting is a key element in intercultural communication, as Wood (19994) notes, "The largest system affecting communication is your culture, which is the context within which all your interactions take place" (Wood, 1994,p.29).

Needless to say, intercultural communication competence requires Chinese tourists to have fundamental cultural knowledge and social customs enabling them to meeting a set of expectations about how people should behave appropriately in a particular social situation. Therefore, intercultural communication skill training by some experts at the host institution may improve Chinese tourists' cultural knowledge to facilitate their behavior to match the different requirements from different cultures and societies.

## **CONCLUSION**

China has become the top spending nation in the world's outbound tourism market. According to the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations, Chinese tourists spent \$102 billion overseas last year, compared with the \$84 billion that German and American tourists spent. With the continuous development of China's economy, the spending of Chinese travelers overseas is expected to continue to grow in the years ahead.

It is an indisputable fact that the bad behavior of Chinese tourists overseas has tarnished image of the nation. These may be extreme examples, but it is a widely recognized fact that some Chinese tourists behave poorly overseas, such as spitting, tossing garbage and showing a lack of respect for local customs.

Thus, the author took the case as examples, and further analyzed these examples from a perspective of intercultural communication, especially elaborated the different characteristics of the Sino-Western cultures and its influence on the people's behavior, focused on the important function of social etiquette to make people behave properly in different public places including international tour.

Finally, according to the uncivilized behavior of some Chinese tourists abroad, the author put forward some suggestions such as educating the Chinese tourists' awareness of civilized manner, training etiquette skills for international tour, and learning some fundamental cultural knowledge of foreign countries, so as to guide tourists to conscientiously abide by public order and social customs, respect local cultural customs and religious beliefs and not to talk loudly, smoke in public places, and not to litter or spit on the ground and so on.

International tour is an important channel of intercultural communication. Also, the international tour can help different people to get understanding better and learn from people with different cultural settings. Meanwhile, tourists' behaviors can build up a good image of the nation and promote bilateral better understanding and friendship among different countries.

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