

以貌取人
yǐmào qǔ rén



Judging a Book by its Cover

The Comrade reviews the Chinese 老一套 lǎo yī tào (same old rhetoric) that every aspiring 中国通 zhōng guó tōng (China expert) must know in order to keep up their end of a conversation.

The word 'stereotype,' like the word 'doggie-style,' is difficult to translate accurately in Chinese. A stereotype is an assumption about an individual's behavior or personality based on his or her nationality or skin color. For example, when you 想当然 xiǎng dāng rán (assume) that someone is an alcoholic just because they are Irish, you are guilty of stereotyping.

Luckily we are in China, where there's no such thing as stereotypes. There are only norms-truths and non-truths. But foreigners insist that there is a difference between 'facts' and 'stereotypes'. All this trifling has caused much unnecessary confusion and doubt.

"Foreigners are less civilized than Chinese people." Fact or stereotype?

"All "犹太人 yóu tài rén (Jews) are smart." Fact or stereotype?

"Foreigners are all hairy." Fact or stereotype?

The fact is, it doesn't matter. One comrade's fact is another's stereotype, and vice versa. Rather than trying

to distinguish 'facts' from 'stereotypes,' the Comrade will instead review the Chinese 老一套 lǎo yī tào (same old rhetoric) that every aspiring 中国通 zhōng guó tōng (China expert) must know in order to keep up their end of a conversation with Chinese people. The following statements are held to be self-evident in China. Whether they are true or not is irrelevant!

For example, 混血儿 hùn xuè-ér (people of mixed blood) and 左撇子 zuǒ piē zi (lefties) are 聪明 cōng míng (smart), like Jews. If you think you might be a 混血儿 hùn xuè-ér but aren't sure how smart you are, there are a few 条件 tiáo jiàn (conditions) that have to be met before the 聪明 cōng míng label can be stuck on your forehead: in China, a person of 'mixed blood' refers to the child of two parents of different skin color. The child of a German-French mixed marriage or the child of a Korean-Japanese mixed marriage is not as smart as, say, the child of black and white parents.

And while left-handed people are supposed to be smart, no self-respecting Chinese parent would ever allow their child to grow up using his or her left hand to 写字 xiě zì (write) or 使筷子 shǐ kuài zi (use chopsticks). Forcing the child to use its right hand is for the child's own good - to spare him or her from the inconvenient fate of bumping elbows with right-handed diners at the dinner table.

Here are some standard Chinese stereotypes regarding foreigners of various nationalities:

Americans 美国人 m, i guó rén

All Americans own a 枪 qīng (gun) and would use it in so much as a dispute over a parking space. Americans are all fat, drive Cadillacs, eat nothing but McDonald's and KFC and 交配 jiāo pèi (copulate) all the time. American women are wild and hard to please in bed. Americans are not 谦虚 qiān xū (modest). On the other hand, they are conceited and smug about their wealth and power.

Canadians 加拿大人 jiā nā dà rén

Despite the fact that Canada itself is nothing more than America's running dog, Canadian people are among the least bad of all foreign devils. That's because 大山 Dà Shān, the docile, nerdish Chinese-speaking Canadian¹, has won the hearts of Chinese TV viewers through his yearly asinine spectacle in which he speaks Chinese, behaves himself well and never says anything bad about China or Chinese people.

Japanese 日本人 rì b, n rén

Japanese people are all short. That's why they are also referred to as 小日本 xiǎo rì b, n rén. What they lack in height they make up for in wealth. Their wealth is in part due to being a running dog of the US, in part due to the fact that Japanese people are all 工作狂 gōng zuò kuáng (workaholics). Japanese people are 下流 xià liú (perverted) - they bathe in unisex public showers and purchase 交具 jiāo jù (sex toys) and 黄色录像 huáng sè lù xiàng (pornographic videos) from vending machines.

¹ Mark Rowswell.

But Japanese women are 顺从 shùn cóng (subservient to) men and make the best wives.

Hong Kong 香港人 xīng gǎng rén

Hong Kong people are short, but not as short as Japanese people. Occupation by the British has made them rich, but they still shout when they speak and their 国语 guó yǔ (Mandarin) is unintelligible. Due to the sad fact that Hong Kong women are 泼辣 pō là (disheveled and tattered), Hong Kong businessmen leave their wives and families behind and go on frequent business trips to 大陆 dà lù (Mainland China), where they keep mistresses.

Taiwanese 台湾人 táiwān rén

The 本地 bēn dì rén (natives) of Táiwān, known as 高山人 gāo shān rén are 乡下人 xiāng xià rén (villagers), hence the affectionate nickname 台巴子 'Tái bā zǐ' which means 'Taiwanese bumpkins.' Other Taiwanese are descended from the 国民党 guó mín dǎng (Kuo Min Tang, or Nationalist Party), the running dogs of the American imperialists who fled to Táiwān in 1949, taking enough priceless 国宝 guó bǎo (national treasures) and 金钱 jīn qián (money) with them to ensure their wealth right up to the present day.

Europeans 欧洲人 ōu zhōu rén

According to Chinese stereotypes about Europeans, 法国人 fǎ guó rén (French) are 浪漫 làng màn (romantic) and drink wine constantly.

意大利人 yì dà lì rén (Italians) are 热情 rè qíng

(affectionate) and eat nothing but pizza and spaghetti (which, by the way, was a Chinese invention).

德国人 dé guó rén (Germans) are 认真 rén zhēn (serious; diligent) and drink beer with breakfast. As a matter of fact, German people's homes all have taps that run with beer.

Russians 俄国人 é guó rén

Since 苏联 sū lián (the Soviet Union) has not been doing so well these past few decades economically speaking, there are relatively few Chinese stereotypes about Russian people. The topic of Russian people simply isn't discussed as frequently as topics dealing with other, wealthier nations. Russians spend their days and nights merrily guzzling 伏特加酒 fú tè jiā jiǔ (vodka). They are 野蛮 yě mǎn (uncivilized; savage), and Russian women are 高大 gāo dà (big and tall) and masculine.

And finally, 中国人 zhōng guó rén (Chinese people)

There are certain stereotypes about Chinese people too. For example, foreigners think that Chinese people all know 武术 wǔ shù (martial arts). Another stereotype about Chinese people shared by foreigners and Chinese alike is that Chinese men have small 生殖器 shēng zhī qì (reproductive organs) and that Chinese girls are 保守 bǎo shou (conservative).

Finally, remember that China is a country where more than a billion people share about 100 surnames and the

same 5,000-year-old culture, so the whole concept of 'stereotypes' is rather immaterial. So the next time you think you've come across a stereotype in China, just ignore it like you ignore daily shouts of 'helloor' by the migrant workers currently digging up your street.