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CULTURE SHOCK!

A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette

The *CultureShock!* series is a dynamic and indispensable range of guides for those travellers who are looking to truly understand the countries they are visiting. Each title explains the customs, traditions, social and business etiquette in a lively and informative style.

CultureShock! authors, all of whom have experienced the joys and pitfalls of cultural adaptation, are ideally placed to provide warm and informative advice to those who seek to integrate seamlessly into diverse cultures.

Each *CultureShock!* book contains:

- insights into local culture and traditions
- advice on adapting into the local environment
- linguistic help, and most importantly
- how to get the most out of your travel experience

CultureShock! Taiwan is full of helpful advice on what to expect when you first arrive in the country and how to enjoy your stay. This book shares insights into understanding Taiwanese traditions and values as well as the lifestyles of the people and how to relate to them as friends and in business. Learn more about the main motivations and attitudes that shape their culture and what you should do in order to build more lasting relationships with them. Also included is useful information on finding a home, understanding the language, handling tricky business negotiations and exploring the delicious (and sometimes shocking) Taiwanese cuisine. *CultureShock! Taiwan* will provide you with all you need to explore this vibrant country and make it your home.

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CULTURE SHOCK!
TAIWAN

For Review only



CULTURE SHOCK!

A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette

TAIWAN

Chris Bates & Ling-li Bates

For Review only

CULTURE **SHOCK!**

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ABOUT THE SERIES

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Culture shock is a state of disorientation that can come over anyone who has been thrust into unknown surroundings, away from one's comfort zone. *CultureShock!* is a series of trusted and reputed guides which has, for decades, been helping expatriates and long-term visitors to cushion the impact of culture shock whenever they move to a new country.

Written by people who have lived in the country and experienced culture shock themselves, these books provide all the information necessary for anyone to cope with these feelings of disorientation more effectively. The guides are written in a style that is easy to read and cover a range of topics that will give readers enough advice, hints and tips to make their lives as normal as possible again.

Each book is structured in the same manner. It begins with the first impressions that visitors will have of that city or country. To understand a culture, one must first understand the people—where they came from, who they are, the values and traditions they live by, as well as their customs and etiquette. This is covered in the first half of the book.

Then on with the practical aspects—how to settle in with the greatest of ease. Authors walk readers through topics such as how to find accommodation, get the utilities and telecommunications up and running, enrol the children in school and keep in the pink of health. But that's not all. Once the essentials are out of the way, venture out and try the food, enjoy more of the culture and travel to other areas. Then be immersed in the language of the country before discovering more about the business side of things.

To round off, snippets of basic information are offered before readers are 'tested' on customs and etiquette of the country. Useful words and phrases, a comprehensive resource guide and list of books for further research are also included for easy reference.

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For Review only

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We dedicate this book to
Diana, Richard and Ethan, children extraordinaire—
the best of both worlds.

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Taiwan is a place of contradictions begging to be explored, enjoyed and contemplated. Few locations so small can boast snow-peaked mountains, bountiful plains and tropical beaches, all within a few hours' drive of each other. Culturally, it is just as diverse. You will find yourself surrounded by the ancient traditions of the Chinese as you visit temples and festivals, or watch the *taiji* practitioners commune with the *Dao* in the park; you will also be caught up in the bustle of Taiwan's state-of-the-art department stores and trendy boutiques, selling goods and designer products from all over the world.

Taiwan is home to a Chinese-speaking population of hard-working, hard-playing people. The more you know about them and their country, the more you will enjoy your stay. In trying to introduce Taiwan and the Taiwanese to you, we have emphasised interpersonal communication, usually a major source of frustration to any foreigner. Besides coping with a foreign language, one must remember that Taiwan is a 'high-context' culture: much is communicated beyond the literal spoken word. Vocal and facial expression, hand and eye action, body contact and ritual are part of dialogue. Communication may be difficult between a low-context culture and a high-context culture when the unstated meanings of body language differ between the parties. In Taiwan, *how* you communicate is as important as *what* you are actually saying. This book will help you make your message clear.

Most foreigners you will meet in Taiwan are there for work. Many will be teaching English in cram schools, which is a huge industry. Some will have been sent by overseas headquarters to perform management jobs. Others will have come in search of a more meaningful job than they could have gotten at home, such as in the IT industry. All will have stories about

culture shock or the strangeness they found when settling in. But many, you will find, have stayed for years—teaching English, managing a factory, studying Chinese, Chinese medicine or martial arts. Whatever the reason, Taiwan is seductive. Once one has settled in and become accustomed to the pace and the people, Taiwan starts to work its charms and a temporary affair becomes a permanent love.

CultureShock! Taiwan also discusses things important to the Taiwanese and why they are so. The ‘alienness’ of the foreign culture is a major component of culture shock. We hope this book will help you understand and cope with your new environment. Situations you are likely to face during your stay are fleshed out in the following chapters. Hopefully, these experiences will be less shocking when you yourself encounter them.

This book distils the experiences that an American and a Taiwanese have garnered through 40 years of close contact with the other’s culture. We were often at the interface of the Taiwan/Western communities. Where we felt our experience was uncharacteristic, we have sought the advice of other Westerners and Taiwanese. We thus present a broad perspective. Do note, however, that much of the information about arrivals and settling in pertains to Taipei, which seems to be the jumping-off point for most residents as well as short-term explorers of the island.

We hope you will enjoy your stay in Taiwan and that this book can increase your pleasure, decrease anxiety and misunderstanding, and make your visit a growing experience. Happy trails to you!

As you will learn in more detail in Chapter Eight, there are many ways of writing Chinese using a Western alphabet. In this book, we will present phrases and vocabulary using the Pinyin system originated in Mainland China. This system is not universally used in Taiwan. In fact, under martial law in years past its use was formally discouraged. However, it is becoming accepted in Taiwan. It is also the medium of transmission for most Mandarin instruction worldwide, so it is likely that if you have studied some Chinese, it will have been in Pinyin. When romanising Taiwanese place names or Chinese terms widely known in the West under a different spelling, we employ the spelling method common in Taiwan plus the Pinyin in italics and parentheses so you will know how to say them. Taipei, for instance, is romanised and pronounced *Taipei* in the Pinyin system. Terms and phrases not commonly known in the West will be romanised directly in the Pinyin system, with the translation in parentheses, for example, ‘*Ni hao ma?* (How are you?)’.

MAP OF TAIWAN

For Review only



CHAPTER 1

FIRST IMPRESSIONS



「A journey of 10,000 miles begins with one step.」

— Ancient Chinese proverb

When Chris first arrived in Taiwan in July 1976 for a year of university, it was a very different place from what it is today. International flights landed in the downtown area of Taipei at the Songshan Airport. The air was so polluted by industrial, automotive and motorcycle emissions that it was several weeks before he realised, on a blessed clear day, that mountains surrounded Taipei. There were no Western fast-food restaurants, few international hotels, only one large department store, and society lived under the Kuomintang Nationalist Party's martial law rule. The American military still had a significant presence in Taipei and Taichung, and US State Department language training for Mandarin was conducted in Taiwan, not Mainland China. It was a hot, humid, unairconditioned and odorous place. High grey walls topped with shards of broken glass against intruders surrounded many houses. In the countryside, children riding on the backs of water buffalo in the rice paddies were a frequent sight; fine automobiles were not. A major north-south expressway was under construction, but not yet completed. Few people spoke English, and Chris was disappointed to find that even with his several years of Mandarin training in the USA, he seemed to be unable to communicate effectively.

His very first lunch in Taiwan, though, gave him reason enough to play down the hardship. He dined with classmates in the Hsimenting (*Ximending*) district of Taipei in a famous eatery called *Dianxin Shijie* (Dim Sum World), which has since moved into the food court area of the Taipei Main Station. The specialty of the house was handmade *guotie* (pot-stickers), better than any pretenders made in restaurants in the West or

Japan. Panfried crispy-brown on the bottom, steamed chewy tender on top, these quintessentially Chinese dumplings filled with pork and chives and dipped in sauce were and are a dream to eat. A plate of ten only cost US\$0.12 (present price about \$1.50). This was served with a fragrant bowl of hot-and-sour soup. On the side was a plate of chilli and garlic-pickled cucumber. Dessert was obtained at a nearby fruit stall where ice was shaved on fresh halves of Taiwanese ruby mangoes. For one US dollar, one could eat very well.

Chris first roomed with a Chinese family. The parents were from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces but the children were born in Taiwan. He shared a closed room with the son and on many nights felt sweat trickle down his face as he went to sleep under the warm breath of the electric fan that ground back and forth. It was several months before he realised that the reason he did not understand what his hosts were saying at home was not only that his Mandarin was insufficient, but they were not speaking Mandarin—they were speaking Jiangsu dialect. Every morning, the father would conduct a long, loud ritual expectoration in the bathroom. An old China hand Chris met guessed correctly the man was from Zhejiang. 'They are great expectorators,' he said confidently, and noted that people from that province had a higher incidence of throat cancer.

Because of local custom and small wall-mounted water heaters, Chris had to learn to take baths standing on the wet bathroom floor, not in a tub, with several scuppers of water, rather than take long luxurious showers. Once, during a typhoon, he was scolded by his foster family for underestimating the power of the approaching storm and wanting to go out into the streets during its blow through the city.

Dinner during his first Ghost Festival *baibai* (ritual obeisance to spirits) was a boiled whole chicken, its head hanging grotesquely over the side of the pot on the dining room table, staring squarely at Chris. This with other cooked dishes was served first to the hungry ghosts while the family burned

incense and bowed to the four cardinal directions. When the ghosts had eaten their fill, the family and Chris sat down to eat the 'leftovers'.

Although he had studied Chinese language, history and culture, he was surprised to find how deeply ingrained and personal the expression of Chinese culture was to the many Taiwanese he met. The local people were acutely, consciously aware of their cultural traditions and identity, a cultural self-awareness he had not found among Americans when he was growing up in the USA. Their cultural identity influenced how they dressed, what they ate, how they arranged their homes, how they interacted with one another and with their government, how they prayed, how they raised their children—basically every aspect of their lives. They were openly curious about Westerners, Western culture and habits, but not with any intent of slavishly imitating or adopting what they learned.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS TODAY

Today's first-time visitor will travel on an amazing double-decker skyrise highway from Taoyuan Airport to Taipei, and possibly stay at one of the luxurious international hotels like the Grand Hyatt near the impressive Taipei 101, for a brief year or two the world's tallest building and shopping complex. Taipei 101 is filled with trendy boutiques and local shops and has a large food court selling local and regional eats. Nearby is Vieshow Xinyi, a modern cineplex where one will no longer have to fight with ticket scalpers to get a good ticket to a blockbuster movie.

The air in Taipei is much less polluted than in decades past after several effective mayors pushed through and maintained momentum on Taipei's urban redevelopment agenda. The city now has several elevated highways running north-south and east-west through it, plus a modern monorail and rapid transit system coupled with a modernised bus system, all of which can be accessed with one stored-value EasyCard. The astute visitor will also note the emergence of some major Taiwanese



Taipei 101, for a time the world's tallest building, remains an iconic beacon on Taipei's skyline.

brands, like Acer, HTC, Giant, TSMC and Evergreen Lines shipping. 'Made in Taiwan' now denotes some of the highest-quality, highest-technology products on the planet.

Down-island, the transformation has been just as dramatic. Whereas a trip to Taiwan's 'ricebowl' of Pingtung county in 1976 revealed comfortable, hardworking farmers riding motorcycles, the recent visitor will note the number of BMW, Mercedes Benz and Volvo dealerships. The wealth has been spread around. Unemployment is still low by Western or African standards; destitution and homelessness are exceptions. Martial law was lifted decades ago and with it several political parties contend for seats in the legislature and the presidency. The government has instituted a national healthcare plan that provides affordable healthcare and medication to all. It has also strengthened management of the environment, and the national parks now boast wonderful natural scenic areas not to be missed, like Taroko Gorge on the east coast, Yangmingshan National Park at Taipei's backdoor, and Kenting National Park at the southern tip of the island.

Perhaps the greatest visible change that will strike the first-time visitor is the transformation of the retail economy. In the 1970s there were few chain stores, a role filled by thousands of 'mom and pop' shops catering to specific needs. Many of these have been replaced, or converted to, chain stores: 7-Eleven, Nikko Mart, McDonald's, Cosmed, Watsons, Starbucks and others. There are also many world-class department stores, like Mitsukoshi, and specialty shops, like Eslite bookstore, HOLA home furnishings and accessories, B&Q do-it-yourself megamarts, IKEA, Carrefour hypermarts and more. At the same time, the Taiwanese entrepreneurial spirit pushes back with great fads that sweep even the region outside of Taiwan, like bubble-tea stands. Especially when it comes to restaurants and eateries, the entrepreneurs prevail. Everyone eats out all the time, breakfast, lunch and dinner. And if you are willing to eat in local food stalls and small restaurants, you can still enjoy

really good food—nutritious, delicious and filling—for a fraction of what you would pay in Tokyo or the USA. Noodles, fried rice, roast meats, cold plates, stir-fried vegetables, dumplings, steamed buns, fish and fresh fruits are all available at shop after stall after cart after bakery, all representing great value.

Some things don't change, though. Taiwanese are still hardworking, hard-playing people. Children continue to go to cram schools to prepare for testing in to good high schools and colleges. Men and women work long hours to advance their careers. Despite the hustle and bustle, Taiwanese maintain their spiritual traditions. You will frequently see red metal bins along the street with locals burning 'spirit money' in them. Many buildings still have a raw, grimy, unfinished look to the outside, but the apartments within will be cool havens of comfort and modernity. Taiwanese still stare at foreigners, still ask questions the foreigners might find intrusive and still talk in Chinese about foreigners as if they are not there. Take advantage of their gregarious curiosity about you and hang out where they do: local restaurants, beer halls, teashops, KTV, pool halls, bowling alleys, hiking and biking trails, and parks in the morning. Taiwanese will warmly embrace you.

And remember, the best weapons in your arsenal against culture shock are patience, tolerance and an easy smile.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

For Review only



Wu Ling-li was born and bred in an old and traditional part of downtown Taipei. She grew up in an extended family of grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, and then tested her way up the academic ladder to win herself a place at Providence College, where she studied Business Science.

Chris Bates was bounced around between Atlanta, Georgia, and Fairfield, Connecticut, for the first 17 years of his life, until he pursued a lifelong dream of training in Asian martial arts. He took a Bachelor of Arts degree in Chinese Studies and spent his senior year at Tunghai University in Taichung, Taiwan, before earning a masters degree at Thunderbird School of International Management.

Through *yuanfen* (the principle that the fates of two people are inextricably entwined), Chris and Ling-li met whilst at college in Taichung in 1977. They were married a year later. Their life together has taken them on several tours of the United States (one year each), tours of Taiwan (18 years), and three tours of Singapore (15 years in total). They have worked for Western companies and have certainly endured their share of culture shock. They have three adult children.

Much of their time has been spent at the interface of the expatriate and local communities. Ling-li has befriended many Westerners in her climb to a Masters ranking in American contract bridge and a berth on the Taiwan National Bridge team,

while Chris has befriended many Chinese and Taiwanese, training in Burmese and Chinese martial arts.

Chris worked as Partner in Charge of Heidrick & Struggles executive search office in Taipei and currently provides corporate training on advanced negotiation and cross-cultural communications and management consulting services to both Western and Asian companies.

Chris is the author of *The Wave Man*, a thriller set in Asia and acclaimed for its authenticity. The hard copy is available online at <http://www.koryubooks.com/store/wm.html> or look for the Kindle edition on Amazon.com.

CultureShock! Taiwan is their first collaborative work.