How to Overcome

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Lovin' Culture www.culturelanguage.org 2018

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COMMON STAGES OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

1. **Honeymoon/novelty stage: Everything and everyone is wonderful. The visitor is having a great time, and everything is a novelty. This stage may last a very short time, a longer time, or for some, it is skipped altogether.**
2. ***Culture Shock!* Some people, especially if they are the flexible type, tend to skip this stage. For others it may be brief or long-lasting, depending on how well they follow the methods of overcoming discussed in this article.**
3. **Gradual adjustment. The key word here is "gradual. The experience here is different for everyone. Don't be discouraged it feels too long.**
4. **Feeling at home. Not everyone reaches this stage, but this is the goal.**
5. **Re-entry shock (also called reverse culture shock). When you go back home, don't be surprised if others are not as enthused as you about your trip to China. Also, even though you may experience culture shock in China, you will get used to certain things in China and experience possible negative feelings while adjusting back. This is normal and will pass.**

Note: Most expats experience some degree of culture shock, or at least uncomfortableness, even after feeling at home. This is normal, and should not surprise you if it happens. Just go with the flow, and you will get through it.

SIGNS OF CULTURE SHOCK

1. Fatigue, out of the ordinary.
2. Angry at host culture, more than just occasionally.
3. Unbearable homesickness. Missing home is normal, but if homesickness interferes with your work, study, or leisure, you may be experiencing culture shock.
4. Withdraw from other people, especially locals.
5. Negatively stereotyping local people.
6. Inability to work or study effectively. (Of course, if you were lazy or unproductive before you came to China, then your problem is not caused by culture shock.)
7. Irritability beyond your normal, possibly accompanied by either loss of appetite or compulsive eating, drinking, etc. Sometimes, this even includes unexplainable crying.
8. Uncontrollable frustration over unfamiliar food, language, and cultural behaviors. To some extent, this frustration is normal, but if it becomes out of control, it may be due to culture shock.

Sometimes feelings of culture shock are intensified by jet-lag. This is temporary.

Note: Some general frustration may not be classified as culture shock. Things are different in a new country, and it takes time to get used to those changes. Even if your experience is indeed classified as a mild case of culture shock, this is very normal. There is no reason to panic. It make take time, but try to enjoy your stay in China!

METHODS OF OVERCOMING CULTURE SHOCK

- **Learn "why" people here do things differently than people back home. Do an online search for "polychronic culture," "collective cultures," and "high power-distance cultures" and understand "why" people are different.**

- *Try to see the big picture. That person crowding into your personal space, staring at you, or asking questions that make you uncomfortable, is a very temporary situation. What is your big picture? Experiencing a new culture? Having a story to tell back home? Accomplishing a business or academic goal? Focus on the big picture!*

- Get involved with local activities and learn about the culture. Study culture. Attend events. Get involved. It is hard to fit in when you aren't involved.

- ***Make local friends: not just your interpreter, guide, or business partners. Make an effort to make friends with Chinese people.***

- *Understand your place as the guest; don't expect people to adjust to your culture. This is their country. Respect that, and you'll get along better.*

- Spend "some" time with other expats. A little time talking about your difficulties here is therapy. But, limit this time.

- **Do not spend time with other expats who are negative about the host country; negative attitudes are terribly contagious.**

- **Do not spend time with other people who have culture shock, unless you are sure you can help them (and even then, limit your time with them).**

SPECIAL TIP: Some of us expats really are happy here in China. Find people like this, spend time with them, and find out why they are happy!

TIPS

GENERAL TIPS FOR MAKING YOU THE KIND PERSON WHO CAN HANDLE NEW CULTURES

1. ***Learn to be flexible***. **Overly rigid people always have undue struggles when confronted with other cultures. Think of the uncomfortable situations forced upon you by other cultures as things that will stretch and form your character.**
2. **Learn to be a less judgmental person. You may have different personal, moral, religious, or ethical standards than some people around you, and you may be right. But mature people are able to find a way to disagree with others without self-righteously looking at them condescendingly. If you learn and practice the skill of developing a non-judgmental attitude, the process of becoming more comfortable in other cultures will be much smoother, and in the long run, you will be happier.**
3. **Be aware of your own values that you cannot compromise. If you truly feel secure with your values, you will not feel threatened when you are in the company of people with different values. You may disagree with them, but you will be able to lovingly hold your head high (not in arrogance), without looking down on others.**
4. **Work on expanding the limits of your personal comfort zone. Not only will this make it easier for you to adjust to other cultures, it will make your life easier in general.**

Reality check: If you've already tried all the tips here for overcoming culture shock and you are still unable to cope, maybe it's time to just get on an airplane and go back home. Some people really aren't meant for being abroad.

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