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Life & Culture: Ghosts and Superstition in Chinese Business

生活文化专栏: 中国商业行为中存在的迷信思想

Ghosts and Superstition in Chinese Business



Chinese people have a strong belief in traditions and in what Westerners would consider superstitious thoughts. This belief influences Chinese people's daily life and even business decisions. Margrith A. Lin-Huber writes about Chinese superstitions, ghosts and old traditional beliefs and how they influence the lives of Chinese, still today.

Although they live in the modern, enlightened world of the 21st century, most Chinese are still strongly influenced by the tradition, even people with high education. One of the most evident phenomena of this aspect is "superstition" (as it would be considered by Western people). Daily life is sometimes so determined by traditional rules or sayings of superstition, that these become a habit, and seem totally natural. Many of these superstitions could directly influence business peoples' behavior. You may have experienced this, but without taking note or asking for an explanation.

Some business people depend on 'fortune tellers' to increase their business, to improve their career or with a view to enhance their luck. Chinese business people are not bashful to hide this kind of instruction, such as to wear something, which they obtain from their fortune-teller. If you enter an office, you may discover some very special decorations, such as a tiny mirror high on the wall. You may allow your curiosity to ask why and the office owner would be pleased to explain this to you.

Lucky days, bad days

The Chinese Lunar-Calendar or Farmers' Calendar, (also called Yellow-Calendar because of the cover colour of the calendar booklet) is rather popular. People consult it to decide many things: the almanac gives a table of suitable or unpropitious days for weddings, the exact hour of entering a honeymoon's room after a wedding ceremony, store opening and funeral times, or just to find out a lucky day for normal activities of life. To manage this kind of situations, Chinese always say: "It is better to believe than just to ignore", so they just follow the rules of tradition. It is never too complicated to carry out all the required details and there is no need for thinking of a way how to avoid them. Some people think that following the rules of tradition may even be only for a better sleep, and for that worth.

Ghost belief

Ghosts are a central theme when talking about superstition in China. From various sources, such as the Romans, wall painting in temples, story telling and motion-pictures, Chinese people get their illusion of

ghosts from childhood on, and share the universal belief in ghosts. There is a wide collection of ghost stories in the Chinese popular literature, and telling a Ghost story to a group is one of the common amusing and scaring part of a camping night, especially with kids and young girls. Ghosts and superstition are inseparable. The 7th month of the Chinese Lunar-Calendar is called the "Ghosts-month", because in this month ghosts are released from hell and wander everywhere. They could attack at any moment, during day and night. The external invisible power is very big; therefore, people should be careful while doing anything. In fact, Business people with strong traditional sense will not open a new shop, make new investments or sign any contract, if they can do it at a later time. If your Chinese partner comes with an excuse to postpone a business appointment, but without a far-reaching reason, that could be a compromise with the tradition. You should not insist. Perhaps some weeks later everything will be smooth. For some businesses, such as wedding party agencies, it is the lowest month of income in the whole year; it is a "small month", as Chinese business people use to call it.

Protection from ghosts

There are different ways to get protected from ghosts. One way is by means of the color "red". This is the reason, why many buildings have red columns. Or you may pass a bridge in a typical Chinese garden and see that the bridges are not straight, but zigzag. This is because ghosts can't turn off left or right, so they cannot follow. Also, to prevent a ghost from entering in a house, people used to make a high threshold at the main entrance. Sometimes it could be so high that one has to raise their leg to get in.

Chinese Valentine's Day

But in the 7th month there are not only days with fear. The 7th night of the month is the night of lovers. According to an ancient tale, two lovers, one weaving lady and a cow herder, meet each other only once a year in this very special night over a birds bridge, which is made by bird wings and bodies of crows and magpies. People nowadays would call this day the Chinese Valentine's Day.

Margrith A. Lin-Huber has done comparative research on the acquisition of language in different cultural environments. Some of her main findings and other useful stories and explanations about Western contact with the Chinese culture can be found in her book "Chinesen verstehen lernen". The second edition was published in November 2005 by Verlag Hans Huber, Bern, Switzerland.

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中国商业行为中存在的 迷信思想

中国人非常相信传统习俗以及在西方人看来是迷信的思想，这对中国人的日常生活乃至商业决策都产生了影响。Margrith A. Lin-Huber在此探讨了中国人的迷信观念、鬼怪说和一些传统思想以及它们是如何影响中国人的现代生活的。

尽管生活在现代、文明的21世纪，许多中国人、甚至高学历人士都仍深深地被传统思想所影响。其最为明显的表现形式就是“迷信”。有时传统观念和迷信说法太过主导人们的日常生活以至于成为了习惯，习惯又成了自然。许多迷信思想能直接影响到商人的行为。你以前也许也遇到过这样的事，只不过没有追根究底。

一些商人依赖“算命”来帮助其发展业务和个人事业并指望它能带来好运。中国商人们对于遵照算命的指示这一行为并不羞于承认或者有所忌讳，例如他们会大大方方地穿着算命先生指示他们穿的衣服。当你走进一个办公室，你也许会发现一些非常特殊的装饰品，例如在墙上高高挂着一面小镜子。出于好奇心的驱使，你也许会问为什么然后老板就会乐于向你解释这样做的原因。如果后来你们的生意取得了成功，你可能会觉得你的合作伙伴这样做也不无道理。

幸运日，倒霉日

在中国，阴历或农历日历（由于日历的封面通常是黄色的所以同样也被称为黄历）颇受欢迎。人们在决定一件事前会首先参照阴历上的说法。阴历上会提供合适或不宜嫁娶的时日、婚礼过后进入洞房的良辰、开业及丧葬的吉时或者仅仅是一个平常走运的日子。中国人对于这些总是抱着“宁可信其有，不可信其无”的态度，所以他们仍遵照着这些传统习惯。为了给自己带来好运，他们对于那些烦琐的要求——照办且丝毫不想法儿来避免。有些人认为这样做其实仅仅是为了睡得安心，但那样也值。

鬼神论

说起中国人的迷信思想，不能不谈鬼神。中国人从小时候起就从各种各样的渠道中形成了他们对鬼神的印象；这些渠道包括神怪小说、寺庙墙上的壁画、老人们口中久远的故事以及电影。在中国通俗文学中可以找到大量神怪故事集；在野营的晚上对着一群人，尤其是小孩子和年轻女孩讲鬼故事是一个颇受欢迎的保留节目。鬼神与迷信之间有着密切的联系。中国农历七月（7月29日——8月27日）被称为“鬼月”，因为在这个月里鬼怪们被阴曹地府释放并到处游荡。不管白天黑夜它们都会突然袭击。这种无形的力量是巨大的因此人们必须谨慎行事。事实上，有着强烈传统意识的商人会推迟开业、投资或签订合同的时间以避免恶运。如果你的中方商业伙伴想要推迟一项商业计划却给不出有说服力的理由，这也许就是由于某些传统思想所造成的。这时你最好不要坚持。也许过了这几个星期所有的事都会一帆风顺的。这个月对于像婚庆机构这样的行业来说无疑是收入淡季。中国人过去称此月为“小月”。

防身措施

有各种各样的方法来防止鬼怪近身。其中一种是“红色”。这就解释了为什么中国的许多建筑都有着红色的柱子。另外，你也许会发现一些中国式古典园林中的桥是曲折而非笔直的，这是因为鬼怪不能转弯，所以这种桥能阻止它们通过。除此之外，过去人们还会在大门口造一道高高的门槛以防止鬼怪进屋，有时门槛过高以至于人们必须抬高他们的腿才能跨入房间。

七夕节

然而这个月中也并非尽是恐怖的日子。农历七月初七之夜是恋人们的节日。根据古老的传说，一年只有在这天晚上天上的牛郎和织女这对恋人才能在鹊桥上相会，据说此桥是由乌鸦和喜鹊的翅膀与身体搭成的。这就是七夕节——中国的情人节的由来。

Margrith A. Lin-Huber对不同文化背景下的语言习惯做了大量的研究和比较。在她的著作《学会了解中国人》（由德国Verlag Hans Huber, Bern,出版发行）中可以了解到她关于西方人接触中国文化的一些研究成果和实例说明。

Events Review 商会活动点击

BEIJING 北京



September 16, 2005 - Billboard for SwissCham for 10 Years of Dedication in China

As part of the dedication to the promotion and growth of Sino-Swiss trade and economic relations for over 10 years in China, the People's Government of the Beijing Municipality, Chaoyang District, has provided SwissCham in China with a complimentary billboard.

2005 marked not only the 10th anniversary of its activities and presence in China, making SwissCham one of the oldest foreign chamber of commerce with activities in China, but also constitutes the 55th year anniversary of Sino-Swiss Trade and Economic Relations with the People's Republic of China.

The 20 x 8 meters billboard will be located along the East 3rd Ring road, a prime location on the freeway between China World - the Central Business District (CBD) and the Lufthansa Center and will last for two to three months. This generous gesture by the Chaoyang Government, and in particular Governor Chen Gang, constitutes great value and exposure for SwissCham and for Sino-Swiss trade.

Today, SwissCham also signed a strategic partnership agreement during the 6th Beijing Chaoyang International Business Festival, at the China World Trade Center. This agreement is the first of its kind and aims at expanding business cooperation, investment promotion and communications channels between SwissCham and Beijing Chaoyang.

The Agreement, signed by SwissCham President Mr. Cyrill Eltschinger and H.E. Dr. Chen Gang, Governor of the People's Government of Beijing Chaoyang, includes reciprocal services as well as improved SwissCham access to Beijing's top business district, which also holds the Central Business District (CBD) of Beijing.

2005年9月16日 北京 瑞士商会喜获朝阳区政府表彰

在瑞中经贸关系建立10周年之际，北京市朝阳区人民政府给中国瑞士商会颁发了荣誉榜，鼓励中国瑞士商会在促进瑞中经贸关系中所作出的贡献。

2005年标志着瑞士商会在中国成立和发展的第十年，也是瑞中经贸关系建立的五十五周年。中国瑞士商会是最早在中国成立的外国商会之一。

这个20米长8米宽的荣誉榜将置于北京东三环高速公路上，并保留两到三个月。荣誉榜位于东三环的主要干道，该地方连接国贸—中央商务区及燕莎中心。朝阳区政府，尤其是朝阳区区长对中国瑞士商会的这种嘉奖将进一步扩大瑞士商会在中国的发展并促进瑞中经贸关系的发展。

今天，中国瑞士商会与北京市朝阳区人民政府在国贸举办的第六届朝阳国际商务节上签署了一项战略伙伴协议。此项协议开创了类似协议之先河，目的在于扩大中国瑞士商会和北京朝阳区之间的商务合作，促进投资，扩大沟通渠道。

此协议由瑞士商会总裁埃尔钦汗先生以及北京朝阳区人民政府区长陈刚签署。协议包括双边互惠服务，以及对瑞士商会更大程度地开放包括中央商务区(CBD)在内的北京高级商务区。

1 October 17, 2005 - Business Talk: Visit by Swiss Parliamentarian Delegation

Luncheon with Swiss Parliamentarians, headed by National Councillor Pierre Kohler, and accompanied among others by the listed government representatives above. The delegation was looking at issues such as Swiss trade relations with China, investment environment in China for years to come, trade issues affecting Swiss companies, and many other matters.

Photo Credit: Mr. Richard Liu, SwissCham BD Manager

2005年10月17日—商业会谈“瑞士国会议员代表团访华”

与由瑞士国会议员Pierre Kohler带队的瑞士国会议员代表团共进午餐。同时，以上所列政府官员也出席了晚宴。代表团就瑞中贸易关系，中国未来几年的投资环境，瑞士公司在中国发展贸易的有关事宜等与中方进行了会谈与磋商。

摄影：中国瑞士商会商务发展经理刘念祖先生

