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Tapescript – Michael

I decided to go to China because I thought it would be a very interesting place, very different to where I live or where I had lived, you know, the way of life out there would be completely different to, to, what I'm used to. I thought it would really challenge myself as well.

I taught when I lived in China. I, um, I taught at a university. The students I was working with wanted to come and study in the UK and I prepared them for their studies in England.

To be a teacher in China you have to, first of all, have a degree which is a requirement of your visa but, um, it's also useful to have what they call a CELTA qualification which is a, an, a four-week intensive teaching qualification which runs you through the basics of how to teach.

I lived there for about three and a half years and in that time I worked in, I lived and worked in three different parts of China. The jobs that I had were in, were in, different parts of the country so I basically just went where an attractive job was.

I think perhaps the biggest challenge of going to China was not being able to read or write any script. It was like being, being, a child again because you couldn't read street signs. You couldn't read menus in restaurants. You couldn't read signs on shops so quite a lot of the time you didn't know what buildings were without going into them and kind of looking around. But over time you learn the basics and you do, there's an obvious system to the characters and once you've learnt that, it is possible to use, to learn to read and obviously, that's kind of the biggest challenge but aside from that, but linked to it as well, there are all kinds of communication issues not only with language but the whole issue of face in Chinese culture and the Chinese will go to great lengths to avoid having to say 'no' where if you've asked them to do something and they can't, they'll always find an excuse why they can't do it instead of telling you 'no' straightaway.



Doing business in China is, I think, a very complicated thing as an outsider. There's obviously the whole issue of face and that kind of thing. But a lot of weight is placed on personal relations and there's a whole tradition of gift giving. When you're doing business with someone in China it is the customary thing to take them a gift even when, upon first meeting. You know, typical things would be an expensive bottle of cognac or brandy or something or if it's male-to-male business dealings, it's, cigarettes would always be a gift that's given. But also, I think, as a Westerner in China, the Chinese are always very grateful, very impressed if you make an effort to at least learn some of their language or if you take the time to, um, to pick up some of their customs and habits then, um, they, they will be very appreciative and they'll be very impressed.

The Chinese always thought it was very, very unusual how much we in the West say 'please' and 'thank you' all the time. Interestingly there is a word in Chinese for 'please' but in the three and a half years I was there I don't think I ever heard anyone say it. Not because they're rude but it's just not in their, in their culture to say it. In the UK we say, we say 'thank you' when the waitress, you know, in a restaurant when the waitress brings us the menu, when she asks us what we want, when she brings us the cutlery. And in China I found myself doing that because that just came naturally to me. But if I was ever out with Chinese friends they would always think it was very, very unusual.

It's also not the done thing to leave tips in restaurants. The waiters and waitresses, they don't understand, or they didn't understand if we left some money on the table. They didn't know what it was for. So, so, that's something to avoid. Yeah, eating out was always quite an experience.