

Preface I:**Deciphering the “coded message” of Chinese culture**

This preface defines culture as a “coded message” intelligible only to insiders of a group. The book it envisions would seek to “decode” Chinese culture for outsiders—foreigners—focusing on habits, ideas, experiences, and beliefs. It would seek to clear up up misunderstandings about Chinese culture, and analyze the “codes” of Chinese culture in a frank, objective, and entertaining way.

The Coded Message

Culture is not a univocal concept. Just looking up the dictionary, we can find over six definitions for this word. Many scholars home and abroad have had a shot at defining it. “Technically speaking, group-related learned perceptions (including verbal and non-verbal codes), attitudes, values, and belief and disbelief systems, plus accepted and expected codes of behavior taught by the groups with which we identify, are what constitute culture,” proposed Singer (1998). It’s really a professional definition which almost involves everything, and it rings true. Just as Seelye writes, “culture includes everything people learn to do” (1974).

Of course, the definition of culture varies from person to person, looking from different perspectives. I echo the sentiment with Singer. To me, culture is indeed a coded message, intermingling all aspects of life, which can only be decoded within the certain group of people.

When I say “coded message,” I mean a particular way of life and unique style of things, based on shared norms. Our shared norms lead to “the collective programming

of the mind” (Hofstede 1991). Therefore, in this case, people who don’t have the sense of such norms, or not live in such society, have difficulty understanding these “message.” The “code” to understand is actually the standard of how we perceive the idea, how we act in certain occasions and the values we all believe.

People like I mentioned above are so-called outsiders. They may learn China only from the biased media or some books written years ago. Our book is intended to uncover the mist of Chinese culture for the outsiders, who are curious about our unique “messages.” With the prosperity of science and technology, China is no longer the one she used to be. She has led a life with diversity, adjusted to the economic, political and social environments.

As we can see, culture changes rapidly with time. So the “code” changes as well. To reveal the newest version of the “code,” we write this book. Culture is a word, which “packages” unique activities and values of a particular group of people. As time flows, something was added into the package and something was moved out. Our book is about things, which are unique and interesting in Chinese culture at present.

If you are interested in Chinese history and traditional Chinese culture, this book isn’t for you. In this book, we focused on the new phenomena and elements occurred recently. As a result, it won’t include the colorful history China witnessed. Nor will it tell the story of her age and greatness. If you are passionate about culture of Confucianism, it will be a wrong way to go as well.

Though this book aims at the present, it isn’t intended for politicians or some scholars. We are not going to talk about the background information about how we form

the new culture. We won't cover the economic and political environments where we are now.

What we are going to display in this book is a picture of different aspects of life. As we are talking about Chinese culture, it covers the "codes" of our habits, ideas, experiences, beliefs and so on, which may help you change the old-fashioned ideas about Chinese culture and have fun in learning the interesting phenomena in China in recent day.

Tradition has it that a host often propose a toast to show their enthusiasm in China. Nevertheless, some may get confused, for it's impolite for one to urge the other to drink in the west. In this occasion, an outsider may get the "message" wrong for he doesn't familiar with the "code" here. If you are the guest, and refuse to drink the wine, it indicates that you don't show due respect to the host. What's more, sometimes in a business occasion, in order to get a contract, the one will drink the wine that others urged, which stands for a kind of credit enhancement. In addition, tracing back to ancient times, to bid farewell to their friends, poets also urged friends to drink to express their love and wrote poems about it. The drinking culture can be "decoded" only by us insiders. The "message", that the phenomenon conveys, is actually "coded" to the outsiders. This is what I mean "culture." At the same time, this kind of topics are what we are going to discussed deeply in our book.

Chinese culture is so diverse that it has too many facets. We will lay out these codes to the unique "messages" of Chinese culture without whitewash. Just as the drinking culture I mentioned, it can be "decoded" in rather different ways. Truth is the

truth and we will neither sugar up the reality nor belittle anything. Hope the book help to lay out how we perceive the “messages.”

(word count: 808)

Reference

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- Seelye, Ned. *Teaching Culture: Strategies for Foreign Language Educators*. National Textbook Co., 1974.
- Singer, Marshall R. *Perception and Identity in Intercultural Communication*. Intercultural Press, 1998.