

An Introduction to International Business Cultures - Asia

Students who've completed a foreign policy or international business program of study might be eager to begin working in a foreign country. Perhaps they might be a bit ambivalent or scared, too. After all, the business practices of various nations in Africa, Europe, Asia and even, North America can differ vastly from American business customs and etiquette. Several Asian nations, notably China, Japan, and India, have the potential to dramatically shape the world economy over the next decade. Across Asia, workers highly skilled in computers, engineering, manufacturing, and biological sciences are revolutionizing global methods of innovation, business, and production. It will become more likely over the next decade that a business college graduate will work with professionals from one or more of these Asian nations especially if that graduate pursues a career path with many international opportunities. Developing cultural sensitivity and awareness is very important for cross-cultural exchanges. This article will explore some common business basics among people of several different Asian nations, while offering little-known, fun tips and facts.

Building relationships: Chinese, Japanese, and Indian international business Asian cultures tend to be much more collectivist than Western counterparts. In business decision-making, the group as a whole chooses a course of action. An individual worker's identity is strongly shaped by the group for which he or she works. In American business, conversely, one is much less likely to see collaborative strategies though the newest generation of American office workers is beginning to change this. International business program graduates who work in China, Japan, or India might wish to develop their group work skills further before heading abroad. Greeting individuals with a handshake, a slight bow of the head, and eye contact is polite. The firm, authoritative American handshake can be overkill overseas. Touching other professionals is taboo in Asia. Personal space is important; it is not considered polite to stand very close to someone. It is always best to observe the behaviors of your professional associates, and act appropriately. Expect business to be conducted in a slow, deliberate fashion, and rushed business deals to be regarded as highly suspect. Speak slowly and clearly, and present new ideas cautiously. Aggressive proposals or overly showy body movements will not be interpreted well. Being on time is also essential. Asia is a continent of punctual business professionals, and it makes good sense to be early -- or, at the very least, on time -- to each new business meeting or collaborative opportunity. It also helps to be willing and able to gently negotiate and compromise. Consensus-building trumps maverick ideas in Asian countries. Building strong business relationships is absolutely paramount in Asian countries, too. American workers abroad are at a disadvantage in this regard, because they will need to overcome cultural barriers to build trust and respect. They will also need to demonstrate their business skills in an honest, but not boastful fashion. Talking less and listening more are always wise moves when meeting a new business colleague. Status and rank are of greater importance in Asia than they are in mostly-egalitarian America, so pay attention to who's who in a company but, of course, get to know everyone with whom you will be doing business.

Customs for Asian countries Of course, Asian business cultures will vary in their customs. In Japan, for example, gift-giving is much more acceptable than it is in China although gift-giving can be an appreciated token if done correctly. Each Asian culture also tends to prefer some ways of greeting professionals over others. Typically, using the last name and the person's professional title (such as 'Dr.')

indicates respect. Asian business dress is sometimes more formal than standard American business dress, especially since jeans and t-shirts have become more acceptable in the American post-dot-com age. Navy, black, or grey business suits with conservative ties for men; and dark dress suits or formal, conservative sheath dresses and jackets for women will work well. Business shoes should be dark, polished, and as conservative as possible. The presentation and reception of business cards is also important in Asia. It is most polite to have your business card printed double-sided, with the Asian language on one side and English on the other. You should offer your business card with the Asian language side facing up. When accepting other business cards, treat them as valuable: Study them carefully to memorize names and information, and never stuff them into your pocket. For your business cards, you might want to consider purchasing a hard case that snaps shut, and which can be tucked discreetly into a briefcase or purse after the card exchange has occurred. Working abroad can be great fun. Americans can learn much from their Asian professional counterparts, and, by following some simple etiquette guidelines, can enjoy a most enriching cross-cultural experience.

About the Author

Potomac College, with Washington, DC and Virginia locations, offers courses and [programs in international business](#). Some graduates of the [international business program for adult learners](#) opt to seek careers around the world. For more information, visit the school's Web site, www.potomac.edu.

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