

# Jack Leblanc's China Business Crib Sheet

A lexicon of selected China business terms for the unversed barbarian

**JV** Joint venture; in China this often turns into a joint adventure due to cultural misunderstandings between the Chinese and Western parties involved.

**Language Barrier** A daily problem.

**Laowai** 'Barbarian', probably you!; those who don't belong to the inner circle of the Chinese community.

**Old China Hand** A barbarian is crowned thus when a Chinese party is in urgent need of a favour; a barbarian who has lived for quite a while in the Middle Kingdom.

**Baijiu** Rocket fuel, alias rice wine or some other fermented concoction.

**Karaoke** Dark stuffy place of leisure to sing, drink and relax; sometimes also used as a bonding tool during meals.

**Guanxi** The personal relationships that oil the wheels of commerce.

**Tian An Men** The political centre of China.

**Forbidden City** Beijing residence of 24 emperors from the Ming Dynasty until the end of the Qing Dynasty. Only the royal family, concubines, servants and eunuchs roamed this vast complex. The common man was permitted to enter on royal invitation only.

**Zhongnanhai** A compound next to the Forbidden City from which the Central Government rules the PRC today.

**Face** Something one can lose or gain. The art of giving face is way more difficult than causing one to lose face.

**Danwei** Work unit; besides a job, it also provides housing, schooling and medical care. Until the economic reforms were well underway it was virtually impossible for a Chinese citizen not to belong to a work unit.

**SOE** State-owned enterprise.

**Xiahai** 'Jump into the sea'; to give up the safe confines of a job in a state-owned company and start one's own private enterprise. This type of jumping was extremely popular in the eighties and nineties.

**Ganbei!** When two or more glasses meet around the dinner table. 'Cheers', 'Bottoms up', 'Scholl!'

**The Sound of Silence** A most valuable negotiation tool.

**Privacy** In China, a slightly different concept compared to in the West.

**Greater China** The PRC + Taiwan + Hong Kong + Macau.

**Overseas Chinese** People born in China or of Chinese descent who live outside Greater China.

**Long March** The heroic retreat of the communist leadership and 87,000 Red Army soldiers in 1934 while on the run from the Kuomintang. One year and 9000 km later, through mountainous terrain, marshes and several battles, they reached Yan'an in Shaanxi. Less than 10,000 survived this perilous expedition; Name for a range of Chinese space launch vehicles.

**Princeling** A well-connected son or daughter of a high cadre in the Communist Party.

**Business with Chinese Characteristics** The main reason why it's so much fun to sell equipment, source products or run a business in China.

**Panda Huggers** Unconditional China lovers.

**Dragon Slayers** Unconditional China detesters.

**Gong An** Public Security; Police; often found sitting in the office sipping tea and smoking cigarettes, waiting to be pressed into action.

**Hanyu Pinyin** The most commonly used romanization system of Chinese characters in Mandarin. But since this system was developed on the mainland, Taiwan won't have anything to do

with it. As a result, chaos reigns with the conflicting Tongyong Pinyin, Yale, Mandarin Phonetic Symbols II and Wade-Giles systems fighting for supremacy on street signs and maps.

**3Q** SMS phonetics for ‘thank you’ in Mandarin Chinese.

**Er Nai** Modern-day concubine; second wife. Often to be found in the presence of the successful and wealthy. In money terms, a lot more costly to maintain than the legally wedded first wife.

**Liberation Truck** The first truck built in the PRC, based on a Russian design. The earliest version can still be admired on the one-fen note.

**New China** After the founding of the People’s Republic of China on October 1st 1949, a reform movement was put in place to eradicate China’s old customs, superstitious beliefs, land ownership, inequality between women and men, illiteracy, prostitution, gambling, and so on... and a New China rose from the ashes.

**SEZ** Special Economic Zone. In China, an area which provides investment incentives to foreign companies in the form of tax benefits, tax holidays and infrastructure. Presently those zones have lost much of their uniqueness, as only those investments encouraged by the central government receive this kind of red-carpet treatment. However, with some help from local government officials, some local taxes might be waived.

**Soft Sleeper / Hard Seat** Take a hard seat on a train from Beijing to Chongqing. Feel, enjoy and become one with the masses. For the return journey, book a soft sleeper. Compare and understand.

**RMB** Renminbi, People’s money; Chinese currency.

**‘To get rich is glorious’** Soon after Deng Xiaoping articulated these words in the fall of 1992 to instigate economic reforms, millionaires started to pop up all over the country. Glorious, yes, but not always innocent.

**People’s Daily** An efficient propaganda machine and mouthpiece of the central government.

**Four Modernizations** At the end of the 1970s Deng Xiaoping brought forward a new socialist reform plan to modernize industry, science, agriculture and defence – an alternative to the centrally planned and command-driven economy that had created much of the country’s political and social instability. This new revolution in turn kick-started the present-day ‘economic miracle’. A new movement has since taken root: ‘harmonious society’.

**Feng Shui** Wind and water; an ancient Taoist practice of studying the natural currents of the Earth to ensure proper alignment with them so that ‘positive energy’ is not disrupted. If you’re in desperate mood, a feng shui master can assist in putting your unprofitable business back on track. Arranging your office furniture in the right way will stop money flowing out the doors; having the right number and colour of fish in your office aquarium will fend off business disasters...

**‘You do not understand China’** A mild form of rebuke. Too bad if someone tells you this. Try to keep your dented pride in check; your accuser might know you better than you think. Often used during an argument, debate or negotiation.

**Iron Rice Bowl** A symbol of lifetime employment, housing and social security granted under a centrally planned economy. For most, this bowl has been broken by labour market reforms.

**Jiaozi** Chinese dumplings.

**Sea Cucumber** Slippery sea creature which is part of Chinese banquet cuisine. Flavourless and of rubbery consistency, it is said to have aphrodisiac capabilities.

**XO** Extra Old Cognac. An alternative to viagra; a must for seniors in karaoke bars who hope to impress a babe or two. XO has been the foundation of many an *er nai* relationship.

**One Billion Customers** Part fallacy, part obsession, part nightmare.