

- **Source:**
 - ◆ http://www.webofculture.com/worldsmart/gesture_asia.asp#

- **Topic:**
 - ◆ **Gestures in Asian countries**

- **Main points:**
 - ◆ **Greetings and salutes**
 - ◆ **Basic rules of etiquette**
 - ◆ **Eating manners**
 - ◆ **Do's and taboos**

- **Collectors:**

Bangladesh

- Bangladeshis will shake the hand of a Western man, but if the Bangladeshi meets a woman of either nationality, he or she will just nod their head while being introduced.
- Approximately one quarter of the population in Bangladesh is Hindi, thus, the proper greeting is the “**Namaste**”.
- It is considered unclean if you transfer food from your plate to another's plate, even if it is your spouse's plate.
- Please remove your shoes before you enter a mosque in Bangladesh. If you see that other people are washing their feet too, do the same.

China

- The Western custom of shaking a person's hand upon an introduction is becoming widespread throughout China. However, often a nod of the head or a slight bow will suffice. If your Chinese host does not smile upon introductions, don't worry. The Chinese culture is rooted in the attitude of keeping one's feelings inside rather than displaying emotions openly and publicly.
- The Chinese generally are not a touching society, especially with visitors. Thus, avoid any prolonged bodily contact.
- Personal space is very limited in China, especially while conversing. You may have the idea to then move backward, which probably will make your Chinese host follow you forward, thus resulting in a bit of a dance!
- The Chinese love to applaud, thus don't be surprised if you are greeted by a round of applause, even by children. If you are applauded, be respectful and return the applause.
- It is common in China to show one's surprise or dismay by sucking air in quickly and loudly through the lips and teeth. If you have been shown this gesture, it would be advisable to modify your request, thereby not having the Chinese host face the situation of saying "no" to you, which they consider to be very embarrassing.
- Silence is respected in China, so don't be discouraged if there are long periods of no talking. This time can be used for contemplation by your hosts. During a conversation, though, be respectful about not interrupting when someone else is speaking.
- If you are offering your Chinese host a gift, it is common for the Chinese to decline the gift several times before accepting it; this is a matter of proper etiquette in China.
- Seating arrangements are important in China. At a business meeting, the main guest is always seated at the "head of the room", facing the door, with the host having his or her back to the door. When dining, the guest of honor always sits to the left of the host.

Hong Kong

- Due to almost one hundred years of British influence in Hong Kong, many British customs are apparent. A firm handshake is appreciated, however a looser grip might prevail, and the personal space between people is somewhat smaller.
- When talking with someone, be sure not to blink your eyes conspicuously, as this is a sign of disrespect and boredom.

- To beckon someone in Hong Kong, extend your arm and place your palm downward. Make a scratching motion with your fingers.
- Never use your index finger, with your palm up and toward you with your finger wagging towards you...this gesture is only for animals.
- To signal to a waiter in a restaurant that you would like your check, make a writing motion in the air with your hands.
- Tea is often served during business meetings. Do not drink your tea until your host begins. If the tea is untouched by your host for a long time, then this may signal that the meeting is finished.

India

- A Western woman should not initiate a handshake with a man in India. Many Indian women will shake hands with a foreign woman, but not a foreign man.
- When meeting someone, it is advisable to fold your hands as you would in prayer but your fingers (palms pressed together) should point upwards rather than forward. This is done simultaneously while using the Indian greeting "**Namaste**" (pronounced "**num - us - tay**").
- When walking down a street in India, do not stare at the impoverished population, as this is considered a way to humiliate them.
- Avoid showing anger, as this is the worst way to achieve anything in India.
- When walking towards temples or other holy places, many street salespeople will approach you with their hand outstretched as if wanting to shake your hand. Be careful, as this is many times merely a scam to allow the salesperson to latch a religious bracelet on your wrist and then demand a donation.
- Before entering a temple (or any sacred area for that matter), it is usually required that you remove your footwear. There is usually an arrangement for this, and you may have to pay a small fee to the person in charge. Needless to say, it is foolish to leave expensive footwear outside the building while you go inside. If you are reluctant to leave your footwear unattended, it is advisable to let your companion watch over it while you take turns going in.
- To express remorse or honesty in India, people will grasp their earlobes. This is a gesture used by servants when they are scolded.
- When you wish to point in India, use your chin or your full hand, but never just a single finger, as this is used only with inferiors. The chin is not used to signal to superiors. The best way to point is with the full hand.
- It is advisable to use your right hand while offering an item to someone. However, this is something that is not followed very strictly these days, and almost overlooked in the city. Nevertheless, you never know when you may offend any old- world people.
- In India, it is considered rather offensive to (even accidentally) step on someone. Any action that involves your foot and someone else's person is offensive. Apologies should be made immediately. To illustrate this confusing tip, for example, if you step on someone's toes, or your leg or foot brushes against them, etc. There is another important aspect to this -- the slightly unusual form of apology on the part of the offender. Again, I need not tell you, that a "sorry" will suffice and the ritual I am about to describe may not be expected, though you will encounter it if someone happens to step on your toes or whatever. After committing the "offense" the other person, as a form of apology, may tap you (touch you briefly with the tips of his fingers usually on the shoulder), and then in the same motion tap his own forehead. This is a form of apology, a way of seeking forgiveness for the action.

- Elders in India are never addressed by their first name. It is always advisable to use the proper title.

Indonesia

- When meeting someone for the first time in Indonesia, you should offer your hand to be shaken, and slightly nod your head.
- If you are seated and cross your legs, cross them at the ankles or knees, but not with one ankle up on the other knee.
- When pointing, Indonesians will point with the thumb extended, instead of the forefinger.
- To show approval, you may pat another person on the shoulder, but never on the head.
- When you are finished eating your meal in Indonesia, leave some food on your plate. To leave nothing on the plate is a sign that you would like more food.

Japan

- The act of presenting business cards is very important in Japan. Remember to hold the business card with both hands, grasping it between the thumbs and forefingers. Present it with the printing pointing towards the person to which you are giving the card, and bow slightly. Your Japanese host will accept the card with both hands, bow slightly and then read the card carefully. When you receive the business card from the Japanese host, be sure to examine it carefully and avoid quickly putting it away. Place it on the table in front of you for further reference.
- The Japanese find it difficult to answer a definite "no" to either a question or statement. They signal that they "don't know" or "don't understand" something by waving their own hand in front of their face, with the palm outward. This also may signal that "I'm undeserving" if you pay them a compliment.
- Listening is considered both a sign of politeness, as well as a valuable skill in business negotiations in Japan. Japanese often think North Americans need to listen more attentively, not talk as much, and certainly not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
- The "OK" signal in Japan is often interpreted as the symbol for money, whereby the circular shape of the index finger and thumb together suggest the shape of a coin. This symbol may be used in a store if you want the cashier to give you your change in coins.

Malaysia

- There are three distinct ethnic cultures represented in Malaysia: Malay, Chinese and Indian. Thus, each culture has its own customs.
- When a person stands with their hands on their hips, this is a sign of anger.
- If you see a prayer rug in a Muslim's office or home, do not stand on it or touch it with your feet.
- Indians have a unique way of showing their agreement. They move their head quickly from side to side. Many Westerners often misread this gesture as signaling "No".

Myanmar

- It is not proper in Myanmar to show public displays of affection.

- Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar, thus practices of the religion are widely revered. Thus, the bottom half of the body is considered lowly, while the upper half is held in greater esteem.
- When you see any statues or images of Buddha in Myanmar, do not touch the head of Buddha.
- The feet in Myanmar are considered "unclean", thus it is very rude to show the soles of your feet or even raise your feet, such as in placing them on a table or desk.

Pakistan

- It is customary to be greeted with coffee or tea in Pakistan. Accept the offer, or you may offend your host.
- Women are often separated socially from men.
- Staring is quite common in the Pakistani culture, so don't be offended if you feel someone is staring at you.
- An obscene gesture in Pakistan is the closed fist.

Philippines

- Filipinos often greet each other with the "eyebrow" flash, which is a quick lifting of the eyebrows.
- Filipinos will point to an object by shifting their eyes toward it or pursing their lips and point with their mouth, not their hands.
- When dining with your Filipino hosts, try to leave some food on your plate as a sign that your host has provided you with enough food.
- When you are being entertained during business times, you may be asked to participate in group singing sessions. Try to go along with the fun.

Singapore

- The elderly receive great respect in Singapore, thus be sure to hold doors open for them, rise before they enter a room and give up your seat to them on public transportation.
- When seated, cross your legs at the knees so that the sole of your shoe is not displayed to other people.
- Littering is strictly forbidden in Singapore, and anyone caught violating this law is subject heavy fines. This includes the throwing away of cigarettes also.
- Singapore, like Malaysia, hosts a mixture of Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures, so the respective customs and mores apply.

South Korea

- During introductions, the more senior person offers to shake hands first, but the younger person bows first.
- Men have priority in Korea, so please note that a man will walk through a door first, walk ahead of a woman and woman will help them on with their coats.
- Shoes are removed before entering a Korean home.
- Do not open a gift when you receive it from your Korean host; open it later in private.
- When entering a conference or dining room, please wait to be shown to the seat designated for you. Even if you are the guest of honor, make a slight protest before going to your designated spot, as this demonstrates the trait of humility, which is greatly appreciated by Koreans.

Sri Lanka

- Although the British culture is a strong influence in Sri Lanka, there are still many different ethnic groups and castes in the country, and each hosts its own cultural nuances.
- Always extinguish a cigarette before you meet someone.
- People in Sri Lanka often smile instead of saying "thank you" However, a Western woman should be cautious about smiling too much, as this may be seen as a sign of flirtation.
- As stated previously, a caste system still exists in Sri Lanka, so if you invite someone to sit down with you, and they are reluctant to do so, please do not keep insisting.
- Any image of Buddha is sacred, thus do not ever touch, lean or sit on one.

Taiwan

- Avoid touching a child on the top of his or her head.
- To show great respect for an elderly person, cover your left fist with your right hand and raise both hands to your heart.
- Good posture is important in Taiwan, with Taiwanese men usually sitting with both feet firmly fixed to the floor. Women will cross their legs at the knees or ankles.
- Always present and receive a gift in Taiwan with both hands.
- Toasting while dining in Taiwan is common, with the word being "Kan-pie", which means "bottoms

Thailand

- The traditional greeting in Thailand is the "**Wai**" wherein the hands are placed together in a prayer-like position and the headed is slightly bowed. It is similar to the "**Namaste**" in India. The "**Wai**" symbolizes "hello", "thank you", "good-bye" and sometimes "I'm sorry". The higher you hold your hands while performing the "**Wai**", the more respect you are conveying. Never raise your fingertips higher than your face.
- Do not step on a doorsill when entering a building because Thais believe that a deity resides in the doorsill and stepping there will offend that deity.
- When passing in front of someone in Thailand, especially an elderly or more senior person, lower your upper body slightly.
- Never place your arm over the back of a chair in which someone is sitting, or affectionately pat someone's shoulders or back in Thailand. Both gestures are seen as offensive in Thailand.