

CASE STUDY: WHOSE FACE TO SAVE?

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The sound of the clock tower resonated throughout the campus as it struck six. Audrey left her apartment and walked to the soccer field where her Chinese colleague, Xiao Wang, was playing the game of football with Michael, Nathan, and Tasha. They were Audrey's North American teammates who came to Hua Mei School in Guangzhou, China, to teach and share.

As a form of outreach, Michael, Nathan, and Tasha had been getting together every Saturday afternoon for the past month to play football with anyone on the campus who was interested. Xiao Wang had joined them, looking forward to football every Saturday and enjoying learning how to play. He especially enjoyed getting to know Michael and Nathan, the male foreigners.

Xiao Wang highly regarded Michael and Nathan and was excited to bond with them, even though they were foreigners. He considered Audrey like a little sister. It seemed natural to him because, even though one of the foreign teachers, she was Chinese-American.

Earlier in the week, Xiao Wang talked to Audrey about his desire to take them out to dinner after their game of football and asked if she would join them. Xiao Wang wanted Audrey to be there because she was his closest foreign companion and he didn't know Michael and Nathan very well yet.

Shortly after Audrey arrived at the soccer field, the game ended and Michael, Nathan, Tasha, Xiao Wang, and Audrey left the campus for dinner.

"Where would you like to eat?" Xiao Wang asked as they walked through the campus gates. Immediately, Nathan made a suggestion of a particular place down the street. Audrey felt uneasy. As a Chinese-American, she was aware of how cultural values play out in both the Chinese and the American settings. Among Americans, Nathan's suggestion was appropriate, but here it was different. Audrey struggled with being a Chinese-American in China, especially when she was caught in the middle of a cultural *faux pas* and she was unsure of what to do or whose face she should save. In this case, she knew that the proper Chinese way to select the place to eat was for her teammates to insist that Xiao Wang be the one who choose, since he was the host. Once Nathan made his suggestion, however, Audrey wondered what should she do or say. If she corrected Nathan in front of Xiao Wang, the latter would be distressed over the loss of Nathan's face. But Nathan had already made Xiao Wang lose face by not letting him choose where they ate. Xiao Wang graciously agreed with Nathan's suggestion, and Audrey decided it better not to say anything.

When they got to the place Nathan had suggested, the waitress came to the table and gave a menu to Xiao Wang. This made sense as he was the only person who could read and order in Mandarin. As Xiao Wang flipped through the menu to pick entrees that he would like his foreign friends to try, Michael pulled out a generic Chinese-English menu from his wallet and started ordering a few dishes, reading off the ping yin that he learned.

Audrey was again frustrated. She knew that the proper way to handle the order was to let the host be in charge, which allowed him the honor of treating his guests well. Again, she faced a

dilemma. What should she do? Should she speak against her teammates, by suggesting that Xiao Wang choose the dishes? If so, Xiao Wang may insist on what they ordered to save his foreign friend's face anyway.

While Xiao Wang was speaking with the waitress, Tasha asked who would like a cold drink. Seeing that Michael already had a bottle of water, Tasha went to the stand next door and brought two bottles of ice tea, one for her and one for Nathan. Audrey became aware that Tasha didn't buy enough drinks for everyone at the table. Should she motion to Tasha to buy a few extra to save her face or should she just go buy a couple extra bottles for herself and Xiao Wang?

After eating, the bill came. Instead of fighting for the check, each of Audrey's teammates pulled out their wallets to pay for their percentage of the meal. Audrey felt uncomfortable with the individualism of paying for yourself being displayed. Should Audrey step in and fight for the check with her host?

Audrey had never had to talk with her teammates when invited to eat with a Chinese host. But now she experienced an almost unbearable tension, and felt stuck in the middle. If she kept quiet and did not correct her teammates, they would continue to dishonor Xiao Wang, their host and Chinese friend. The friendship would not last long with that type of behavior! Not only that, Audrey herself would be shamed, being associated with these well-intentioned but culturally rude guests. However, if she did speak up, her teammates might not understand what she was trying to say. In fact, they might even disagree openly in front of Xiao Wang – or, even worse, ask Xiao Wang to settle the disagreement. Audrey was trapped; what could she do?