

## Stereotypes

I really enjoy Chinese food. In fact, I like Cantonese cuisine over most other Asian regional dishes. The colours, textures, smell and taste of Cantonese food not only whets my appetite but tells me to go back for more and more. I have been to countless Chinese dinners since I arrived in Hong Kong seven years ago. My culinary senses have certainly been satisfied. What never ceases to amaze me, however, is the concern shown by others at the dinner table. I have lost count of the number of times I have been asked by my fellow diners: *do you know how to use chopsticks?* Sometimes I am not even asked this question; the waiter simply replaces the entire chopstick place setting with a knife and fork. In my early days in Hong Kong I felt offended. These days I smile politely and change the subject of conversation.

So when did I first use chopsticks? I remember my first visit to a Chinese restaurant. I was at school, probably in Form 2, when a Chinese restaurant opened in the town in England where I was living. At the time I thought the restaurant was so exotic, with red lanterns, colourful dragons, paintings of junk boats on the harbour and waitresses dressed in traditional clothing. I remember some of the first dishes I ate that evening: sweet and sour pork, Cantonese fried rice and one dish that was probably an English variation: deep fried banana. I can also remember struggling with the chopsticks but determined not to be defeated by two short pieces of wood! The year was 1967. That means I have been using chopsticks on and off for more than 45 years. In fact, there are very few people at this assembly who have been using chopsticks longer than me. Indeed, a high percentage of the teachers at this assembly were not on this earth in 1967!

The point of my story is that we must be careful not to label people. In my case, some people assumed that because I am a Westerner I cannot use chopsticks. Yet those same people would be horrified if I asked them if they knew how to use a knife and fork. There are many examples of labelling or stereotyping people and we are all guilty of making such judgements. According to some Hongkongers who have written to the daily newspapers in recent weeks, drivers of cars bearing cross-border number plates should be banned from driving on our streets because *we all know that mainland drivers are terrible drivers!*

Some stereotype labelling might give people a positive boost. Westerners often say that *all Chinese students are good at Mathematics* whilst Asians often believe that *all Australians can swim and surf*. Yet stereotyping

often leads to false views about people. Let me give you some examples: *all men like sports, all women love to shop, children don't enjoy healthy food, and boys do not like to read.* Occasionally, stereotyping can be outright rude or even racist, for example, *all Americans are fat* or *all Muslims are terrorists.*

Many Hongkongers might say that *St. Paul's College boys come from rich families* and that *all the brightest students will study at the University of Hong Kong.* We know that this is not the case. It is so important to look at another person as an individual human being rather than trying to classify him or her in some particular way. To do so is to jump to a conclusion. Surely, it is better to get to know that person and find out what makes them unique and special.

In the Bible, the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* teaches that we should not judge others according to race, gender, religion or wealth. The story tells us that it is wrong to use stereotypes and that we should treat people equally. Sadly, many labels are unpleasant and can lead to hurt and great pain. The next time you are tempted to label a person think about how others might label you. You should treat others as you wish they would treat you. My advice to you is to stop and think before you make the mistake of automatically stereotyping others.

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