

# Illia Marushchak



What to expect from  
Asian employers and partners?

What do the locals words and  
behaviors really mean?

Who can become successful  
on the yellow continent?

**NOT FOR TOURISTS**

against the yellow background

**ZERO  
TOLERANCE**

Ilya Marushchak

**Against the yellow  
background. Zero tolerance**

«Издательские решения»

## **Marushchak I.**

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If the idea of living and working in Asia has ever crossed your mind, this book will be a perfect guide to the parallel yellow universe. What to expect from Asian employers and partners? What do the locals really mean by their words and actions? How to become successful here? You'll find all the answers in the book written by an experienced marketing specialist and business developer, Ilya Marushchak who has been living in Asia since 2013.

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Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

# **Against the yellow background**

## **Zero tolerance**

**Ilya Marushchak**

*Parallel universes do exist, and sometimes we find ourselves there, but, being too confident of our exclusiveness, we never realize being there.*

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## Chapter 1. Who is this book for?

Every book has its reader. It doesn't matter whether the author was aiming at them in the first place or whether some specific type of people becomes the recipients of the writer's message, but every book has its niche. It's different with this book. Anyone who can imagine for a moment that they are going to live in Asia for a considerable amount of time might get interested in this book, and it will be helpful.

When you think of living somewhere else, you inevitably think about the money you need. Well, if you're not some kind of a beneficiary enjoying your life with no need for working hard to earn daily bread. I think it is clear for everyone now that we're going to talk about Asia. It's the part of the world that, in fact, is a parallel universe for "westerners". Why do I call it so? Come here and stay for a few years, you will have your own perfect idea of everything, if only you're not too lazy to analyze things. I label Asia like this because Southeast Asian countries have a very long history of social development, and, until quite recently, all of them were closed for any mutual interference of not only the "western" culture, but, mostly, the neighbouring cultures as well. Believe me, underneath this thin ice of familiarity on the surface that seemingly resembles of our culture concepts, there is an ancient civilization with thousands years behind. "Western values" are a parallel universe for this civilization too. Despite the cross-cultural interaction of our worlds, it doesn't go any further than the economic cooperation yet. But even this kind of cooperation only concerns macroeconomics without deeper effect. These days the universe of SEA, with its unimaginable pace of economic development, becomes more attractive for individuals who, due to different reasons, try to build their life and career there, or, at least, have started to seriously consider it. There are many people like this, but they can be easily divided in a few categories.

I guess the largest group involves employees hired by Asian companies that attract more and more foreigners these days. Asian companies have offices all over Europe and America where most of the staff members represent the "Western civilization". But now Asian companies extensively hire foreign employees for their offices in Asia too. These companies are not huge international corporations; more often they are small or medium firms operating at the local markets only. Regardless of how big the company is there will always be significantly fewer foreign employees than the local ones, so they will have to work under the conditions of the "parallel universe". So, first of all, this book is for them.

The next large group of my readers includes those people who decided to try and start their business in this part of the world. Small western companies along with individual businessmen and merchants have been massively longing for SEA for the last several years. Economic upswing, increase in population and its growing wealth give more business opportunities not only for global international giants but for individual venturers as well. But while large international companies can afford to play by international rules, small firms (and individual businesses, of course), again, have to live and work under the conditions of the "parallel universe".

In the context of the worldwide globalization people's way of thinking transforms accordingly. People get new ideas and they quickly become world trends or stereotypes. Whatever works. One of such ideas proclaims that in order to provide yourself a decent living wage in Asian countries (where it is so cheap, warm, exotic – name it) you only have to work a couple of hours a day, enlighten ignorant locals about blessings of the Western civilization and sunbathe on the beach or enjoy your hobby for the rest of your time. As a result, the "globalization generation" is striving for Asia. They are reaching out for self-support, independence and everything that the globalizing world can offer them. The fate has something different for them in stock though. Anyway, there are so many people of this type that this book will be apparently useful for them too.

Besides, everyone who probably doesn't have to make money here but would like to integrate into Asian society for some time will also find some tips in this book. For example, someone has come here for work or business and their family have followed them. Lack of social interaction and familiar cultural environment can be devastating for any immigrants, whether they're here for a long time or just for temporary residence. The more different the foreign mindset is, the more complicated it is to get used to it. I think everyone has already learned the simple truth: even if you speak one language it doesn't necessarily mean that you understand each other.

Even the happiest family cannot stay socially and culturally isolated for long. Expat communities are not always a satisfactory substitute for what people left back home.

This "parallel mindset guide-book" will be helpful for everyone whose comfort, wealth and success largely depend on social relations and communication skills.

I have to mention one very important point before I continue. There will be no search for general "humanistic ideals", no attempts to "understand each other", no recommendations about "how to become a local" or "how to make 1000 Asian friends". In this book you will find purely pragmatic tips for building bridges that will lead you to getting the most out of it depending on what you actually need. Some will probably think that my views are too tough and exactly opposite to what western psychologists and communication strategists would teach you. In fact, it's true. I don't have much in common with them. I have deliberately chosen this line against the modern mainstream social trends. Many of those who have been born and raised in the world of western cultural values might think that some aspects of social interaction in Asia are ill-favoured and inhumane, so they are constantly trying to "translate" them into more familiar forms to be able to put up with them and keep feeling comfortable in social interaction.

But, mark my words, when for the first time you lose a big amount of money or a good job because they crash against the iceberg of "different mindset", your humanistic beliefs will fade a bit. It's only up to you whether to use this information or not, but it won't hurt to know anyway.

## Chapter 2. Who are you here?

This chapter might hurt somebody's self-esteem. I mean both those who regard themselves as experts in some field and also those who are supposed to be successful businessmen.

I'll try and sugarcoat it from the beginning. Most probably, your self-rating is realistic. But bear in mind, it is realistic according to the reality of the western world. Local reality makes some difference. It is extremely important to realize it and accept as a given, because this will be the basis for all of your future communication "matrix".

The optimum alternative for the start is to tell yourself: "I am an alien. I don't know anything. I don't understand what's going on here. My experience is not an established truth. All seemingly familiar external evidence might turn out to be something completely different".

This approach will help you not to delude yourself with any "familiar" things before you really check and study all the information. Besides, your past experience in social interaction and building relationships is not helpful at all here. There is one most important reason for it. You don't understand what motivates people in every specific case. You might have an impression that something is similar to what you dealt with before. You might imagine the differences are not so big. This will be your biggest mistake. In some (very simple) situations your experience will be useful, of course, but it is always better to spend some time and analyze the motives of the opposite side in details beforehand (well, or later, when something goes wrong). Never jump to conclusions before you get a store of knowledge about this place.

I will repeat it again and again. You are among people whose civilization background goes back thousands of years and hasn't really changed for all this time, whereas the Western world has been drastically changing during the last 100—150 years, especially regarding communication and "universal human values".

So if you still choose to bite the bullet and agree to be an alien, let's move on to the next point. Who are you to them? The answer to this question will hardly make you feel happy.

You are assets. A resource. That's it. You are not exactly a human being to them. Those who don't belong to their race and civilization are not exactly human beings like they are. Actually, even if you do belong to their race, it doesn't mean much if you haven't been brought up in the local traditions of the country and know nothing about them. Those Asians who were born and raised in the West and have different mindset are called "bananas". If they don't share the historically developed moral principles and ethical norms and values of Asia, they are like bananas: yellow outside, white inside.

When they interact with you in any field, regarding any subject, you can be absolutely sure: their priority is always the same – using you to their advantage. There are no exceptions here. You can be a source of material valuables and higher reputation, or even a source of genetic material for their future children. The behaviour pattern can slightly change for those reasons. It is the behaviour that can be different, not the basic approach. You are still a resource. If you remember it and act accordingly, you have some prospects of success.

In order to substantiate my statement, I will make an example at the very mundane level.

If you often go to the market and buy fresh vegetables from the same vendor every time, what they do after some time? In the "western" world the vendor will make a discount for you or choose better vegetables for you and recommend what is fresher today. They will do everything to please you and make you feel like coming here again and again. An Asian vendor will soon start covertly increase the prices for you. It will go on like this until you find it out and leave for another vendor who will do the same after some time. It makes sense: you are a temporary resource, and low prices are for "insiders". They should get their maximum profit from you while you are here. Local ethical principles are for locals and have nothing to do with you. Most of Asian countries have only one prevailing nationality. So don't waste your time trying to find any "integrative" or "globalist" views

in their culture, history, and, consequently, in their minds. You are a representative of another race. Nothing here is about you. You aren't supposed to be equal in their view of the world, and their approaches show it in the best possible way.

Conventional wisdom has it that Asians are all and one super friendly and hospitable but this impression is superficial. Partly it is due to formal politeness that can be called the foundation stone of many ancient Asian cultures. As for the real motivation of some actions, you just won't get it due to lack of knowledge. Here is a simple example. If an Asian that you hardly know invites you to a restaurant with other people that you know even less and pays for you – you are his reputation resource. He has a foreign friend, so his profile has been raised in the eyes of the others.

A few more words should be said about the equality. Forget your beliefs that all people are equal. Forget everything you knew and read about it in the West. Never start any communication on these grounds. People are not equal in Asia. Even if they are equal according to their state law, they are actually not. Asian civilization is a typical “civilization of social status”. Every more or less popular language in SEA has words indicating a person's status in every specific case. Western terms “mister”, “miss”, “missis”, “sir” look like a feeble resemblance of Eastern classifications. For example, Vietnamese language has at least *eight* words describing someone's status in terms of their gender, age, marital status, achievements etc. Asian society is a hierarchical society whether you like it or not. If you are going to live in Asia and always keep in mind what is right and what is wrong according to your personal beliefs, you will only make your life more complicated. Try to place yourself within local hierarchical limits. Try to understand who is “upper” than you, and who is “lower”. It might seem unpleasant to you in the beginning, but it won't become a part of you, it won't change your personality, it won't harm your spiritual values. Regard it only as a working tool. If a person you are talking to doesn't understand your position in the hierarchy, they simply don't know how to deal with you. If you are in a big group of people, be ready to be asked about your age, marital status and children. These are not questions of pure interest, it's an attempt to give you the right place in the hierarchy and treat you accordingly. Your relationships with locals will always be regulated by hierarchical rules. It's the only way for them to communicate. They will be genuinely puzzled if you try to manifest another communication model. We will get into this in the next chapters with a lot of vivid examples.

Until then, let me cite a popular expat joke as an example.

Question: what is your place in a family hierarchy if you are married to an Asian woman and live in Asia?

Answer: “seniors” come first, so your wife's grandparents are on top of the hierarchy. Then come her parents, then her uncles, aunts, their children, then your wife, her brothers and sisters, your children and your nephews and nieces, then – a goldfish in the bowl in your living room. You rank after the fish. Besides, you are the one who should support the whole family.

The next following paragraphs are especially for the gentler sex. Dear ladies, when in Asia, always keep in mind that this is a totally men-oriented civilization. They have probably heard something about equal rights for women but they don't really understand, even now, how we live with it. In general, if you are a woman and plan to start independent business in Asia (or any other independent activity) and communicate on your own, you will have to act a bit different than you used to do at home. First of all, let your skin be as thick as possible, because you will have to put up with local men's teenage sense of humour and behaviour, even though you keep in touch with them only because of business or work. I'm not saying there will be necessarily sexual harassments but, believe me, you will often be left with a bad taste in the mouth. Of course, you can react appropriately to protect yourself, but doing this, you take a risk to lose your potential business partner. Besides, you will constantly have to struggle and prove everyone around that you are really a professional and have a firm character. No matter what you do, no matter what your field is, whether it is oil production or modeling. Makes no difference at all. You will often have a feeling that nobody takes you seriously,

and I wouldn't call these suspicions ungrounded. That's how it is, it's a traditional point of view. You will have to change it in every single case, with every single man you need to communicate with to achieve your goal. Let's be honest, it's annoying. It will take you some time to start to get used to it and change. If you manage to change your ways, you'll be able to run a business or work in Asia. But these changes will be very noticeable for your family and friends, especially for those who stayed at home. Moreover, you never know whether it will make you happy. I can only claim that such acquired toughness will undoubtedly help you do business with any type of partners in any part of the world.

## Chapter 3. Basics of communication

This chapter continues dealing with the hierarchy of Asian society and how to use it to your advantage. The most important thing you always have to understand is what your own place in the hierarchy is according to your companion.

You may find some contradiction here. Like, the author has just said that a foreigner doesn't belong to the local system, but in the next chapter he is already trying to put him in some place in the hierarchy. It's not a mistake. The point is that the tradition of "placing" a person is hardwired to the Asian mindset, so you will be "placed" somewhere automatically, even though you are a foreigner. Therefore, relationships are also structured "by default" – from up to down or vice versa. If this contact is important for you try to understand two things. The first question is what your "default" position is, according to your companion. In order to understand that you should know what your companion's position is among his fellow countrymen who have a similar set of "tactical and technical" characteristics as you do.

For example, if you are a male, married, with children, aged 30—35, and your vis-à-vis is over 50 and has grandchildren, then you are one or two levels lower, so you will be treated like a junior. All your suggestions and opinions might not be taken seriously, if only you are not a representative of someone "higher", officially authorized.

The second question is what kind of resource you are for your companion at the moment.

If you understand these two aspects, you will be able to communicate properly and play by your own rules.

The main thing you will learn is when and how to "log out" of this system. All your local colleagues, partners and buddies have already placed you in the structure, formed the principles of communication and got it right (according to them) how to use you. Even your employees are slaves of the system. They aren't dedicated to the work you have hired them for (you are still a resource). You should understand that. Knowing aims, methods and expectations of the opposite side is a great advantage. I will tell you about a relevant case from my own experience that made me fully review my communication approaches and principles of dealing with local employees.

I guess it was my first year in Asia. I was trying to start a business. In spite of the fact that I had already hired some sales staff, I still preferred to deal with the key customers and solve large problems by myself. We mostly worked with midmarket local companies; so all negotiations were carried on with the aid of Vietnamese interpreters.

One day we had to hold talks with the owner of quite a large distribution company, an elderly woman. The company claimed the status of an exclusive distributor, but there was a big overdue delinquent liability to us on their side. Some of my employees tried to discuss debt payments with her, but in vain. They still owed us a considerable amount of money. These were two reasons (prospects of future cooperation and the need of getting money) why I decided to take part in these negotiations personally.

My translator was a young local girl who had spent a long time in Russia. She spoke both languages seamlessly and worked as an accountant's assistant in our company, so she was fully aware of the situation, its circumstances and the overall goal of this meeting.

The first hour of the meeting was full of mutual assurance of far-reaching prospects and great opportunities of future cooperation. It was traditionally cute and friendly. After that they strongly hinted that it would be perfect to call it a day for now. But since the delinquent payment issue hadn't even been brought up, I insisted on further discussion, all the more so as the list of questions had been approved beforehand. As it immediately turned out (to my great surprise), nobody was even going to raise this question. My partners hadn't prepared any documents from their side for reconciliation. Of course, they still admitted they had a debt. When I tried to ask some polite but very specific

questions about the reasons for having this debt for so long and why my staff couldn't solve this problem in the regular course of business, all the answers suddenly turned into something like "we wanted to pay on time, but there were so many reasons why we didn't – sometimes the western wind was too strong, once we lost the key from the shop, another time the sun set in the east... we just couldn't, you see that we have good excuses... You can understand it. We will pay very soon. Especially if you sign an exclusive contract with us and supply more goods on trust. We also need some budget for marketing", etc. When I was listening to the translation of this monologue, my vis-à-vis was friendly smiling at me and repeating that I shouldn't have worried – everything was fine, it just turned out like this.

But after my polite (I was really polite) request to start talking more realistic, make a schedule for the repayment of debts signed by the owner and agree to suspend shipments on trust until the debt redemption, the interpreter asked to talk to me one on one for a minute.

When we were left alone she said that now it would have been the right thing to thank the partners and leave because since I was much lower by my social status than that old woman, I just couldn't say such things to her. As for the interpreter, she was even lower by her status so she also couldn't translate what I asked her, because that old owner of the company could have been her grandmother. I asked her what I was supposed to do with that flow of pure garbage (some kids in a kindergarten would have sounded more sensible, to be honest) that they had offered as reasonable excuses for delayed payments. She said that in this case the best way to act would be to pretend politely that you had believed it and get back to negotiations later. Also it would be much better to trust local staff to negotiate next time.

I guess, someone less peaceful than me would have already started to feel overemotional about the whole situation. But I realized that anger wouldn't help so I decided to try a different method.

I asked the interpreter to say that she was extremely sorry personally but her boss told her to translate word by word everything that he was saying. After that I politely described my whole vision of the situation and how, from my point of view, it was possible to continue our cooperation. I also genuinely expressed my real attitude to the so-called reasons for the delay of payments.

It had a bombshell effect on them. I could read it from their faces. Their minds were completely blown. I was sure this lady had never met a person twice younger than her who would have dared speak to her like that. For a moment I thought that they were going to say that our cooperation was over. A minute later the lady came to her senses (which I couldn't say about my employees) and said that in spite of the fact that "the terms of the contract had been violated by themselves" and none of it was their fault, they promised to think about it and let me know about the decision.

I will tell straight off – we worked together about a year more after this. I met her again once or twice (when it was really impossible to avoid personal meeting). She always said to everyone that I was very hard to deal with.

I have drawn a lot of conclusions from that case. I will give further consideration to all of them in the following chapters. But I can mention the main one right now – if you know how to immediately "sign off" from the position you were automatically placed, it gives you a huge advantage. Of course, you should fully understand the motives of the opposite side.

If you manage to control this "bombshell effect" it will let you control your opponent while they can't really get what is going on. You can do whatever you want until they find another suitable "niche" for you in their minds. This is a real opportunity to manipulate Asian people that derives from their mindset, and their mindset had been crystallized a few thousand years before this "civilization of social status".

However, it's crucial to use different reasons for these "bombshells". If you repeat yourself every time, they will finally classify you as a caddish fellow and won't deal with you again. This isn't what you need.

Another very important thing is that you can't be real friends with your boss or your subordinate employee. It doesn't conform to local hierarchical models so it doesn't exist. Well, it can exist just for show, in order to take advantage of this behaviour pattern (because you are a resource). Please do remember, if someone has much higher or much lower job position than you do, or they are much older or younger than you are, or they have different marital status, don't even dream about sincere informal communication and friendship on equal terms. You will never have it from "the opposite side". If you are the one who has a "higher position" you won't be rejected out of pure politeness but they will try to take advantage of you in any possible way. If you are "lower" it's much worse because they're going to manipulate you. Some exceptions are possible in romantic relationships, but I guess I might be mistaken because I don't have such experience. My personal observations rather indicate that even love affairs here should be subject to "civilization of status" rules.

There is one more aspect you should be aware about. Foreigners often feel perplexed and even offended because of not knowing it. Traditionally, Asians never say a firm "no". When during the conversation you hear "yes" from time to time it doesn't necessarily mean that they agree with you. It just means they are listening. Never rely on such "yes" even if it seemed very definite to you. Any "yes" from an Asian person is, first of all, a sign of politeness and attention. It's neither consent nor a decision. Don't ever forget that.

Here is an example. You are talking to an Asian friend or a colleague and saying "Let's go to the cinema on Friday? There is a show at 11; I'll buy the tickets. We could meet at 10—40 at the cinema."

Your companion replies "Yes, of course, let's go. What an excellent idea!"

After these words you see the green light – you are ready to buy the tickets and wait for your friend at the cinema as agreed. But for your Asian friend it was just an abstract idea that can potentially be turned into reality. He might come if he doesn't have anything else to do, if he doesn't forget, if he finds the film interesting, if, if, if... In none of the cases he will inform you about it. He could say "yes" just because he felt uneasy to refuse.

If you want to put this abstract idea into action you will have to get minimum two more "yes" from your friend before the event. Otherwise, it won't even occur to him that you have really planned it. He would think it was just blabbering.

But that's small beer that will hardly do any harm to your relationships.

You might have really dire consequences for yourself personally and for your relationship if you express or imply that you have some problem that you are currently unable to solve.

Remember what you have just learned? It is impolite to say "no" in Asia. You are in the "civilization of status". That means that whoever you talk to they will immediately offer you their help. First, they think so because they automatically regard your story as a call for help. Second, it will "elevate" them in their eyes (or maybe not only in theirs) because since you are asking them for help you trust them and think they can manage something you can't manage by yourself.

From this point forward you've got new problems in your life. These problems can be of different severity level. The worst you can do is to wait for your problem to be solved, especially, if you have a deadline.

There are some exceptions though. For example, you mention your problem in front of someone who is an expert in this field. It's easy to understand from the conversation. It is also fine if someone introduces you to someone else so that you could ask for advice. You're lucky then. Unfortunately, 90% of cases have the same above-mentioned script with slight alterations.

You assume that after you discussed the problem and your friend told you he would help, you will get the result at some point. It makes sense from your point of view. But in most cases nothing happens. Most probably, no one was even going to deal with your problem in spite of cordial assurances of support. If you got it right and never disturbed the person with your request again, it's like nothing had ever happened. You simply had a conversation. He might have improved his status though by mentioning to his friends how powerful he is – even foreigners ask him for assistance!

If you start reminding about yourself and asking what has been already done or what you can do to contribute, you automatically activate another program. Finally, according to this new script, you will be the one to blame for not solving the problem. It is you who has given all the wrong explanations, you haven't provided the necessary information or documents, or you have sent wrong documents, to a wrong person, at a wrong time, at a wrong place... You have basically done everything wrong.

As a result, you just wasted so much time of such a busy and important man, but he is so generous and kind-hearted that he holds no grudges. He is even willing to invite you for lunch with his friends in order to tell them all the details about how he wanted to help this stupid foreigner, but the foreigner was so useless that simply ruined everything himself.

At this stage all you want is to cut off contact with this person. Sometimes you are even tempted to apply some physical action. Unfortunately, it will happen every time you would like to ask someone for help.

There is only one way out. You will hardly ever change your skin so much. It's quite hard to avoid such conversations all the time. It's not necessary to avoid them though. When someone insists on helping you, tell them that everything been already sorted out or is going to be sorted out shortly, so no need to bother such an important and busy man. But in case something goes wrong you will surely ask him for help. It's enough to show that you obey courtesy rules. By the way, after you say it, you can easily ask about your companion's opinion about possible solutions for this problem that he himself would have chosen. If he seems to be professional in this field you can choose to really ask him to help you.

I think it's enough for a general idea of local communication style. If something seems too general and "universal" to you, don't get upset. Later on I will make more specific examples of building communication bridges under very different circumstances.

I hope the most important thing you have got out of this chapter is how not to be a hostage to your own communication model. We will learn how to take advantage for ourselves later. Now remember how not to harm yourself. When you live with the permanent lack of communication and native cultural environment even the slightest psychological discomfort can easily turn to craving for the familiar mindset. Sometimes you'll be wildly eager to give the finger to everything, pack your things and be off to the airport.

But if you want to be a success in such a hot place as Asia you need to learn how to keep your head cool all the time.

## Chapter 4. Employment

In this chapter I will switch from general to specific. I hope you already have a general idea about communication in Asia and now we can start looking into practical application of some recommendations that will help you get the maximum profit.

Imagine you work in an Asian company. You're lucky if this is a large international company with a lot of foreign employees. In this case you can skip this chapter. But if you're one of the few foreign specialists under the direction of Asian executives, it makes everything different. In this case you will have to work hard, both literally and metaphorically.

First, you should know about the basic approach that Asian companies apply to the cooperation with foreign experts and partners. The whole idea of such cooperation is getting the unique information and learning about technologies in order to use them independently in the future. In short, as soon as they see that their employees are able to do what you do your cooperation is over. Or they will decrease your salary because you aren't unique anymore. It regards every single kind of activity.

That's why your most important aim (besides performing your primary duties) is to stay unique and irreplaceable as long as possible.

Now let's talk about the motivation of people who work in your company. For those who have hired you, you are an expensive resource, a source of information. This information should be "extracted" from you for the shortest possible time and conveyed to the local employees.

For your immediate superiors and colleagues in Asia you are a person who occupies someone else's position. You are also a person with a salary a few times bigger than theirs. You'll never be forgiven for that. For example, if you're not a top manager, your immediate superior could have 2—4 people of his own for this position (for your salary alone). But here you are – incomprehensible, expensive and more efficient. Your prospects are vague and complicated. However, nobody will prevent them from claiming your results as their own. This is a basic principle of middle management in Asia. That's why you are a resource here.

For your subordinates you are something extremely obscure, and it scares them. At the same time you can be a good opportunity for them to work their way up and gain some new skills and knowledge.

Briefly, this is what it looks like. Later on we will see who exactly you are for different "characters". Now let's have a look at your strategic goals and how to navigate towards them.

To be a success, you will have to do something else before you immerse yourself in the daily routine. You will also have to repeat it occasionally, when you feel it's high time to do it. I'm talking about total formalization of all your relationships and arrangements with your employer.

In local companies all communication is based upon traditions in the society. It means that an immediate superior dominates in everything. Any orders are acceptable. His opinion is always the right one. He can punish or show mercy from his own perspective of the situation. Personal interaction with a superior official upon an initiative of a subordinate is something unthinkable. It can seriously damage their self-esteem. Keeping it in mind, you will have to become an "oasis of freedom" that doesn't yield to dictation and obeys only to the international law. For this reason you should have a maximum amount of all possible documents regulating your rights and duties. These documents should be signed by a top manager or even by the company owner. In addition to the standard contract you will have to prepare and sign a few more documents. Ideally, you'd better have a full job description (a realistic one), motivation and demotivation regulations, intrinsic standards for evaluation of your work performance, frequency of performance control, working schedule, overtime working, vacation and conditions of payment for vacation etc. You should basically have everything regarding your professional activity here. Besides, it is vital to reserve the right of unlimited access to the top executives, as top as possible. Ideally, try to get their mobile numbers.

I venture to suggest that the companies you used to work for had all these aspects more or less formalized. You might have even read it but didn't pay much attention to it because you were "just like anyone else". But being "just like anyone else" in Asia means the following: they will gradually start to underpay you; if you are supposed to have some bonuses beyond your fixed salary you will never actually know how they calculate them; the payment schedule will also be very obscure; they will give you more and more tasks for the same money; the results you get will be passed off as someone else's achievements. After a short time you'll be regarded almost as an ordinary local employee which will mean that you have lost your uniqueness and now they have all the reasons for paying you the same salary as they pay to any local or for firing you. So please, make every single action strictly formal. Asians have some respect for documents signed by their bosses, so if you get their signatures by yourself and have a right to reach them when you need them, it's really an advantage. Don't be afraid to "go overboard" with the amount of papers and conditions. The worst thing that can happen is that they will point out to you that some things are unacceptable. The more papers you have the higher the fence around your "oasis of freedom" is. The more documents are signed the more unique your territory is and seen even at a distance.

I hope now even the most vigorous critics of formalities are convinced to follow these rules after reading this. Logically, all the current working activity also should be formally regulated. Asian people adore all sorts of meetings, conferences and other "collectivization". Of course, sometimes they will discuss something regarding your direct duties and ask you questions. If you consider the question important enough, prepare a document about it for the next time. Describe the question, methods, possible solutions, employees in charge, timing, and stages of control. Do it every time even if it is not customary in this company. When your immediate superior approves something always ask for documented confirmation and signatures of every participant. Don't be afraid to seem a formalist and a pedant. I'll explain to you why you need it. Most probably if an Asian company hires a foreigner, a foreign employee will be responsible for issues concerning at least a few departments' activity. Oops! "Horizontal" interactions in Asian companies are not exactly what you are used to. Tough break! Every structural division is a territory with a personality cult of its boss. It's his personal satrapy. So if you need a specialist from another department to give you a verbal promise about meeting the deadline it's like you're going to do the lottery. For example, this young girl, the economist won't send you the statistics you need urgently even if she swore by all that is holy, just because she was serving tea at the mini-briefing for the chief of her department and his deputy or going out to buy fresh flowers for her boss's study. When a boss asks to do something personally, even if in passing, even if it's some insignificant trifle, not urgent at all, a subordinate can never refuse referring to something more urgent to be done for another department. An employee from another department will do something for you on only three occasions: 1) if they have a document signed by his immediate superior, 2) if his immediate superior asked them to do it personally – this is what really happens, and 3) if they decide to help you by themselves – which is almost science fiction. I advise you from all my heart – rely on the first two occasions only. Remember this once and for all – "horizontal" interactions without any formal documents don't work. You will never achieve your purpose if you expect something from such relationships. If you really need to get something from other departments – once or on a regular basis – try to make it in the most formal way possible. Try to inform heads of these departments personally and ask them to control every employee who will fulfill the tasks for you. Only then you can be sure – at least to some extent – that you will have everything accomplished properly. If you are not sure (especially in the beginning) you can manage it by yourself, try and persuade your superior to arrange it with superiors of the departments you need. Chances are they will gather a meeting and have a long discussion, but, normally, questions are satisfactorily dealt with and you will get what you want. However, don't be surprised when it will be presented as something necessary for your whole department and thereby initiated by the head of your department. It's your responsibility but since he is a very wise chief he decided to get this

process started. Here we can draw a conclusion – every time you involve your immediate superior in accomplishing tasks you're responsible for you're actually losing a bit of your uniqueness and value as an expert. Try to use this method as a last resort only. The less “dangerous” way is to bring up an issue at meetings. As I mentioned before, it's hard to overestimate the importance of various meetings and conferences in Asian companies. It's a “holy cow” in Asia. The format of these meetings has one main difference from the events we're used to – Asian meetings lack real discussion and group decision-making. They are mostly about listening to the opinions of certain executives involved in the process whose views are already known. After everyone speaks out the senior executive expresses his opinion that is also not unknown for every single participant of the process. I strongly recommend you not to really look for a solution at a meeting by discussing all possible pros and cons. Why? It's another feature of Asian ways of communication, very traditional for this society. Any doubt is regarded as lack of confidence. If you have a few possible solutions and want to choose between them you are timid and unable to make decisions by yourself. If you don't have a strong opinion about an issue and you bring it up at a meeting then you want the seniors to tell you what to do. I hope you understand their logic now. My advice is to have a clearly articulated position and precisely formulated proposals if you are going to say something at meetings. Don't change your opinion in public unless you have some new external information that affects the situation or a direct order from your superior. These are the only rational reasons for changing your opinion, and there will be no severe reputational consequences for you. If you change your point of view for some other reason – you lose. Don't be shy to demonstrate the level of your abilities in public. Your professionalism is the best proof-point in any arguments with your colleagues. Prove it in public a few times even if you feel like you're boasting or trying to dominate. Actually only this behaviour will help you to avoid numerous useless discussions and arguments in the future. If you don't show your superiority and status in public or you do it rarely and not very convincingly, be ready that somebody will try to discredit you and explode your reputation in public. All your colleagues should be aware that if they try to “bully” you regarding your professional area, they would sincerely regret about it because the backstroke will be too hard for them to stand. Let them know you can also destroy their reputation if you want. Only your immediate superior is the exception. Avoid any public discussion, no matter how contradictory the matter is. If you have any discordance of opinion it should be discussed privately. This is how to survive and maintain relationships with your superior even if you are much more professional than him. In this case put your ambitions on hold.

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