



# Importing Personal Property Into CHINA

## HOUSEHOLD GOODS AND PERSONAL EFFECTS

- **All household goods and personal effects are subject to duties and taxes** (except for Diplomats). Generally, clothing and kitchenware, in addition to a reasonable quantity of CDs, DVDs, VHS tapes and cassette tapes, are permitted duty-free entry (see **Restricted Items** for additional information). Personal effects, furniture, lamps/lighting fixtures, electrical and electronic items, stereo equipment, office equipment, golf clubs, all alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, tobacco, motor vehicles, and motorcycles are subject to duty and/or tax. Age of items will not be taken into consideration.
- If more than one major appliance is included in a shipment (e.g. refrigerator, television, washer, dryer, radio, etc.), then the shipment may be classified as commercial, thus making customs clearance problematic.
- It is recommended that you visit China at least one month prior to the shipment's arrival to ensure that all documents and permit applications are completed to avoid long customs delays.
- **Five Steps for Foreign Nationals to Import Household Goods:**
  1. **CHINESE VISA:** Obtain valid visa (e.g. "Z" visa, not tourist visa) from the Chinese Embassy in country of origin.
  2. **HEALTH CERTIFICATE:** In China, apply for a Health Certificate at the government-appointed "Health Check Centre." There will be a general check-up, blood pressure and pulse readings, height and weight requirements, ICG, chest X-Ray, AIDS and syphilis tests. The following documents are required: original passport, 4 recent passport-size photos, Health Certificate Application Form (available at the Health Check Centre), Copy of the Business Registration Certificate.
  3. **WORK PERMIT:** After obtaining the Health Certificate, register with the Labor Department to obtain a Work Permit. Processing time is approximately 5 business days. The following documents are required: original passport, 4 recent passport-size photos, Work Permit Application Form (available at the Labor Department), Business Registration Certificate, and Employment Letter. The shipper must verify that their Chinese employer is registered to do business in the shipper's destination city in China, and that the Business Registration Certificate is valid. The shipper must have a registered employer to sponsor him/her to live/work in China.
  4. **RESIDENT PERMIT:** After the Work Permit is issued, the Resident Permit must be applied for at the Foreign Affairs Office. The processing time is approximately 7 business days. The following documents are required: original passport, 4 recent passport-size photos, Resident Permit Application form (available at the Foreign Affairs Office), original Health Certificate, original Work Permit, copy of the Business Registration, and original Employment Letter.
  5. **IMPORT PERMIT:** Apply for an Import Permit at the Customs Office. Without an Import Permit the shipment will not clear customs and quarantine, therefore the shipment may incur demurrage charges. The processing time for Import Permits is generally 3 business days.

### Notes on Household Goods/Personal Effects:

- Shipment must arrive within 6 months of shipper's arrival.
- Only 1 sea shipment and/or 1 air shipment is allowed per shipper.
- Items not declared properly on the packing list may be confiscated, detained or incur penalties. For electrical items, list the manufacturer and size (e.g. 29" Sony Television (LCD), Ink Jet HP Printer, Hitachi 3-door 280 liters refrigerator, etc.). List the type of sofa set on the packing list (e.g. 3-seater leather sofa, 2-seater cloth sofa, etc.). Tax and duty is calculated on the item's make and size, so it is imperative to accurately describe each item on the packing list. Customs clearance ordinarily takes 5 business days.

### **Notes on Household Goods/Personal Effects (continued):**

- For electronic devices (e.g. TVs, radios, washers/dryers, etc.), you are only allowed one of each.
- If you are a Chinese person with a foreign passport and do not have a Residence Card, your goods and effects will be taxed by Customs.
- FCL shipments cannot be delivered in their own containers to most cities in China, due to road restrictions. Special permits are required for such deliveries, subject to road access conditions, and will incur additional charges. Containers can only be delivered after 10:00 pm.
- Customs clearance may be delayed during certain Chinese holidays including the Lunar New Year, May and October holidays. Customs may also close 1-3 days during the New Year, January 1<sup>st</sup>. Arrange shipment arrivals prior to or after the holidays to avoid storage/demurrage charges.

### **FOREIGN RESIDENTS - IMPORT PERMIT:**

An **Import Permit** is required by foreign residents, prior to the shipment's departure. The permit may be applied for in person by the owner; in some cases, the agent can obtain the permit on behalf of the owner. The following documents are required for an Import Permit:

- ✓ Original Employment Certificate
- ✓ Original Passport with Chinese Work Visa (Z Visa)
- ✓ Original Work Permit or Chief Representative Card issued by China Labor Bureau, valid for at least 1 year (Processing time is approximately 3-6 weeks.)
- ✓ Original Residence Permit issued by China Security Bureau, valid for at least 1 year. (Processing time is approximately 3-6 weeks.)
- ✓ Representative certificate or company registration book (preferably in Chinese) for customs
- ✓ Copy of permits for shipper's company issued by the Economy & Trade Committee
- ✓ Copy of company's Business License and Foreign Trading Association Approval Certificate
- ✓ Packing List translated into Chinese, signed by shipper
- ✓ Import Permit application form, signed by shipper and stamped by shipper's Chinese employer
- ✓ Baggage Declaration Form, required by some Chinese cities. 2 copies should be completed identically and given to a Customs official to stamp. The form that is returned to the shipper should be forwarded to the Destination Agent for customs clearance.

**Note:** Import permits for both air and surface shipments must be applied for/registered at the same time.

### **FOREIGN NATIONALS - DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR CUSTOMS CLEARANCE:**

- ✓ Import Permit
- ✓ Passport
- ✓ Resident Permit
- ✓ Work Permit
- ✓ Customs Clearance & Declaration Form
- ✓ Authorization Form
- ✓ Fumigation Certificate
- ✓ Unaccompanied Baggage Declaration Form, completed upon arrival at the airport(s) of entry
- ✓ Ocean bill of lading/air waybill
- ✓ Declaration form of articles for official and private use
- ✓ Separate Import Permits for pets and motor vehicles
- ✓ Clear, detailed inventories in English
- ✓ Attestation of shipper's employer in China verifying employment

### **RETURNING CHINESE CITIZENS:**

- Import Permit is NOT required
- The owner's presence in China is required for customs clearance.
- There are restrictions on shipments to Shanghai or shipments routed through Shanghai. No furniture of any kind is allowed, along with FCL containers or LCL shipments over 7 cubic meters. If any of these restrictions is violated, the owner will incur demurrage charges and the shipment will be sent back to origin.

### **RETURNING CHINESE CITIZENS - DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR CUSTOMS CLEARANCE:**

- ✓ Original Chinese Passport
- ✓ Documents approving the owner's overseas business trip
- ✓ Packing list
- ✓ Ocean bill of lading and/or airway bill

### **DIPLOMATIC SHIPMENTS:**

- Household goods, automobiles and motorcycles may be imported duty and tax-free.
- Diplomats must be physically present in China prior to their shipment's arrival in China to process Customs clearance.
- Customs clearance ordinarily takes approximately 10 working days.

### **DIPLOMATIC SHIPMENTS – REQUIRED DOCUMENTS:**

- ✓ Letter from the Embassy certifying diplomatic status
- ✓ Import Permit obtained from the Embassy
- ✓ Diplomatic card issued by the Embassy
- ✓ Notification letter from the steamship line (available once the vessel arrives in port)
- ✓ Copy of Diplomatic Passport & China Diplomatic card
- ✓ Original ocean bill of lading and/or air waybill
- ✓ Clear, detailed inventories in English

## **PROHIBITED ITEMS**

- Weapons
- Firearms, including air rifles
- Ammunition
- Drugs and narcotics
- Counterfeit or pirated items
- Poisons
- Fresh food, especially meat
- Endangered species of animals and any products made from endangered species
- Plants and seeds
- Fax and photocopy machines as personal effects
- Pornographic materials
- Articles deemed detrimental to Chinese political, economic, cultural, moral or hygienic interests
- Materials that are morally or politically offensive, or anti-communist, or advocating the P.R.C. government.
- Beijing: It is prohibited to import alcohol and tobacco into Beijing
- Certain cities in China prohibit certain food products, wine, alcoholic beverages, etc. High duties and taxes are levied on alcohol, when it's not prohibited. It's recommended to not include alcohol in shipments.
- Certain Asian/Chinese relics (antiques) are prohibited from export. See ***Chinese Relics (Antiques)*** section for more information.

## RESTRICTED ITEMS

- Alcohol (Customs regulations are very strict. We recommend that no alcohol is included in shipment.)
- Foodstuff is restricted. Non-perishable food is allowed in reasonable quantities in the first shipment (subject to tax).
- Office equipment can't be imported as personal effects. If it is, it will be subject to substantial duties.
- Prescription drugs are restricted. You will need a copy of the prescription stating the type of drug and dosage. You are allowed to import a reasonable quantity for personal consumption for a year.
- Furniture, electrical appliances, audio visual equipment, computers, printers, light fixtures, foodstuff are allowed in reasonable quantities.
- CDs, DVDs, videotapes, and cassette tapes will be examined and screened by Customs, which will take approximately 2-3 weeks. If any objectionable scenes are found, the owner may incur heavy fines, penalties, and prosecution. Additionally, the item(s) will be confiscated and the entire shipment may be detained.
- Personal computers with encryption capabilities require pre-approval of software prior to importation. PCs and laptops with simple password software for email, Windows, Microsoft Outlook, etc., and are part of a household goods shipment, do not require pre-approval.
- Grand and baby grand pianos are prohibited unless an appropriate professional certificate is provided.
- Wooden packaging materials: Since January 2006, in line with ISPM-15 Guidelines for Regulating Wood Packaging Materials in International Trade, there is a restriction of non-manufactured wood packing materials into China. Wooden packaging materials must be either heat treated or fumigated with methyl bromide and properly marked.

### Approximate duties for some items are as follows:

- Furniture and personal effects: 10-30% based on Customs assessed value
- Food: 10%
- Bedding: 10-20%
- Electronic items: 30%
- Cars: 80-120%
- Books and periodicals: 10%
- Alcohol & tobacco: 50%
- Golf clubs: 30%

**Note:** Tax and duty rates are subject to change and often vary depending on port of entry and the Customs officer handling the shipment.

## MOTOR VEHICLES

- Motor vehicles are subject to import tax and duty, except for diplomatic shipments. The tax and duty is based upon the assessed value of the vehicle, as determined by Customs.
- Import restrictions are governed at the local level. Import regulations will vary accordingly, dependent upon city regulations/restrictions. Check with a Chinese consulate/embassy in the United States before deciding to import any motor vehicles.
- Only left-hand drive autos are allowed importation.
- It will take approximately 10 business days for the Embassy/Consulate to obtain an import permit for a motor vehicle. Storage/demurrage charges of approximately \$150.00 - \$350.00 may apply.

## Required Documents for Motor Vehicles:

- ✓ Import Permit
- ✓ Invoice
- ✓ Written application to a designated Customs office
- ✓ Import Cargo Declaration

## **DOGS AND CATS**

- Pets, other than cats and dogs, are prohibited.
- Some provinces of China impose severe restrictions and high registration fees on dogs. Check with a Chinese consulate or embassy in the United States before deciding to import any pets.
- Import permits and prior approval from Customs is required. Import Permits can be obtained from the Bureau of Animals & Plants.
- Generally, only 1 pet per foreign passport or residence permit is allowed, depending on the destination city in China. Beijing allows only 1 pet per household.
- Large dogs are prohibited.
- The pet may travel as either accompanied or unaccompanied baggage. If the pet travels as unaccompanied baggage, avoid having the animal arrive at the airport in China after 2:00 pm or on Saturdays, Sundays or public holidays, since quarantine officers may not be available and the pet will be detained at the airport, thus incurring additional charges.
- Once your pet clears Customs, it will be detained at a government kennel for further quarantine inspection for at least 30 days.

## Required Documents:

- ✓ Owner's Passport with valid Chinese Visa
- ✓ Chinese Customs Declaration Form for Incoming Passengers: Check "Yes" in column #13
- ✓ Health Certificate, certified by a government veterinarian in country of origin. The certificate should list the owner's name and be valid for at least 15 days prior to importation.
- ✓ Rabies Vaccination Certificate, certified by a government veterinarian or official quarantine bureau in origin country. The animal's age, sex and weight should be listed on the certificate, along with the owner's name. The vaccination must be administered at least 30 days, but no more than 12 months prior to the pet's importation.
- ✓ Animal Import Permit.
- ✓ Additional documents required for pets traveling as unaccompanied baggage:
  - ✓ Airway bill showing owner's name as it appears in his/her passport
  - ✓ Copy of owner's passport

## CHINESE RELICS (ANTIQUES)

- All Chinese relics made or produced prior to 1911 are prohibited export from China.
- For certain relics, the year limit is 1949.
- The year limit is 1966 for fine art made by ethnic minorities.
- Restricted relics include: porcelain ware, jade ware, glassware, furniture, handwritings, calligraphy, paintings, rubbings, books, documents, weavings, embroideries, cultural equipment, postage stamps, currencies, appliances, handicrafts, fine arts, and carving and sculptures made from all materials, etc.
- All Chinese relics being imported into China, which fall into any of the above listed categories, must be registered with the authorities prior to customs release. Registration will simplify the re-exportation process.

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The information presented herein is based on customs data available at the time of printing and is frequently subject to change without notice. It is the responsibility of the owner or importer of the household goods to comply with the current customs restrictions, regulations, and duties of the country to which the goods are imported. We strongly advise customers to contact the consulate or embassy of the destination country for the most current information on customs regulations, restrictions and duties for importing household goods, personal effects and vehicles.

## NO MEANS YES – 10 TIPS FOR LIVING IN CHINA

1. **Laowai.** This label means “respected foreigner” but can often sound less than complimentary. Although it’s never meant to be rude. If you dislike the label, suggest a suitable alternative, such as your nationality and title, as in “British Engineer.”
2. **Guanxi.** This refers to connections or a certain relationship. In a society overpopulated and bogged down by bureaucracy, favors and personal connections are often the only means to accomplish anything, and the Chinese live by guanxi. People keep in touch with relatives, former classmates, any colleague, because the connection might be mutually beneficial.
3. **No means yes.** In many Chinese social situations, good manners require a refusal. One refuses tea or snacks the first time offered, as well as a seat on a bus, a gift, or some type of assistance. The general rule is that the offering person repeats the offer and the receiver refuses again but accepts the third time.

4. **Kaishui.** This is boiled water, the cornerstone of Chinese daily life. Every home, dorm room, hotel, or office has the ubiquitous red or silver thermos bottles to keep water hot all day. Kaishui is not just safe drinking water; it's also useful for cleaning glasses, bowls, chopsticks, and other utensils before using them. You'll hear locals ask if utensils have been rinsed in kaishui.
5. **Suibian.** This word does not translate into English exactly, but it means "casualness," or "whatever you like." It gets more mileage than any other phrase, and it's very flexible. You can say it when someone asks you what you want to eat, if you want to ride or take the bus...anything. When you're incapable of making a decision, this word takes care to that.
6. **Bargaining.** State-owned shops like department stores have fixed prices, but any privately owned establishment allows bargaining. Find out the usual price of a product first and cut the seller's offer by 50%. If he comes down, you raise your offer, and so on, bit by bit. Your trump card is walking away, which often prompts the seller to call you back and accept your last offer.
7. **Banqueting.** If you're in China teaching or on business, be prepared for big banquets. Remember a few basic rules: First, always wait until the host offers you a seat; otherwise you might sit in the wrong place. The host himself sits in the seat of honor, usually designated by a napkin that's folded fancier than the rest. The person assigned to settle the bill usually sits nearest the door and opposite the host. Secondly, pace yourself. At least 10 and maybe 15 courses will roll past you on the lazy Susan, and the Chinese will generously pressure you to eat more and drink more. Thirdly, toasts can be numerous, so if you don't drink, make that clear immediately. To show gratitude and good manners, give at least one toast with whatever you're drinking.
8. **Nali.** Although this means literally "where," it is associated with modesty and can be used when someone compliments you as well as for asking directions. If someone compliments you, "nali, nali" is an appropriate response.
9. **Mind your face.** The concept of "face" (mianzi) governs the social behavior of all Asian peoples. Nobody likes to "lose face" (diu lian).
10. **Avoid the four "Ts"** (Tiananmen, Tibet, Taiwan, and Turkmenistan) in conversation. "Although most people will tell you their Cultural Revolution experience, the Tiananmen incident is a topic the Chinese are only just beginning to discuss. And Taiwan is considered a renegade province whose residents must return to the motherland politically and geographically at some point."

### **Acknowledgment**

- International Living. "No means yes – 10 tips for living in China." Volume 18, No.1, page 9, 1998