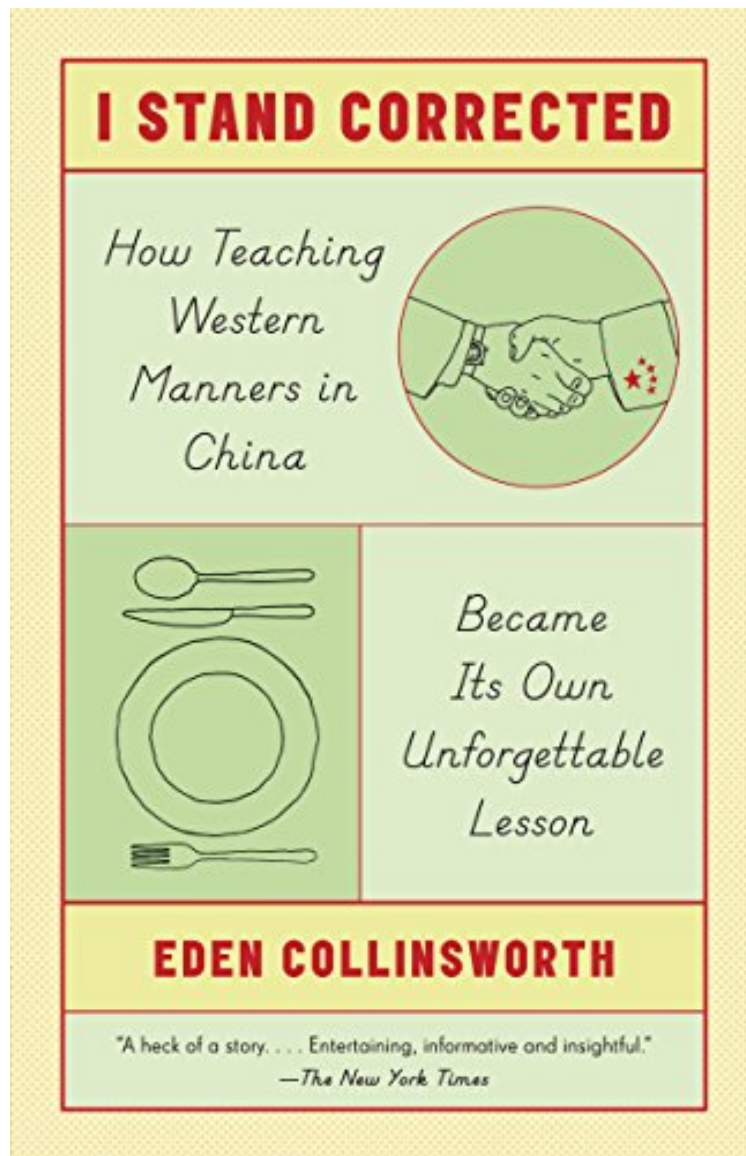


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I Stand Corrected: How Teaching Western Manners in China Became Its Own Unforgettable Lesson

Eden Collinworth

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Too little about China, and too much about the Western savior

vivre. By Rafal Andrzejewski The book is a little bit too light on the Chinese aspects, and too much is borrowed from her (already written) book for the Chinese on the Western customs. The personal side trips make this book a bit tiring at times. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A good overview of working or living in China. By Customer The important thing to remember for Westerners is there are different perspectives in the world. This book does a really good job of explaining the Chinese perspective. This book is very informative and I encourage any who plans on living in China to study this book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent insights into Chinese culture! By Theresa A. Kirchner Just finished reading this 6 days prior to my first visit to China to attend an academic conference at Peking University. What a great orientation!

A fascinating fusion of memoir, manners, and cultural history from a successful businesswoman well versed in the unique challenges of working in contemporary China. During the course of a career that has, quite literally, moved her around the world, no country has fascinated Eden Collinworth more than China, where she has borne witness to its profound transformation. After numerous experiences there that might best be called "unusual" by Western standards, she concluded that despite China's growing status as a world economy, businessmen in mainland China were fundamentally uncomfortable in the company of their Western counterparts. This realization spawned an idea to work collaboratively with a major Chinese publisher on a Western etiquette guide, which went on to become a bestseller and prompted a branch of China's Ministry of Education to suggest that she create a curriculum for the school system. In *I Stand Corrected*, Collinworth tells the entertaining and insightful story of the year she spent living among the Chinese while writing a book featuring advice on such topics as the non-negotiable issue of personal hygiene, the rules of the handshake, and making sense of foreigners. Scrutinizing the kind of etiquette that has guided her own business career, one which has unfolded in predominately male company, Collinworth creates a counterpart that explains Chinese practices and reveals much about our own Western culture. At the same time, *I Stand Corrected* is a wry but self-effacing reflection on the peripatetic career she led while single-handedly raising her son, and here she details the often madcap attempts to strike a balance that was right for them both.

"A heck of a story. . . . Entertaining, informative and insightful." —The New York Times
"A must-read." —Bloomberg Radio
"If Eden Collinworth weren't so good a writer, she'd do well with her own reality TV show. She has a fearless, go-anywhere, do-almost-anything attitude that—combined with her intelligence and keen observational powers—makes for exceptional storytelling." —Minneapolis Star Tribune
"Hilarious and insightful. . . . A compulsive page-turner. . . . An insider's view into the rising power of the East." —Amanda Foreman, author of *Georgiana* and *A World on Fire*
"I Stand Corrected has many interesting, even important, things to say about commerce and manners in China, but the book's real pleasure is Eden Collinworth's company. Her mind is lucid and original, and she's very funny." —Alec Wilkinson, author of *The Ice Balloon*
"There are very few like Eden Collinworth who have actually known China, who have seen its transformation firsthand. With her wonderful book *I Stand Corrected*, she uses her knowledge and experience to build a bridge for readers to cross the river between cultures." —Xinran, author of *China Witness*, *Sky Burial*, and *The Good Women of China*
"Eden Collinworth's adventures on her way to writing a best-selling manual of Western deportment for the Chinese are enchanting. . . . *I Stand Corrected* is an original, fearless, and funny book that you read for its laughs as well as its lessons." —Joan Juliet Buck
"Enlightening, enthralling, and sometimes laugh-out-loud funny. Her revealing and profoundly interesting insight into Chinese culture must be the first of its kind." —Blythe Danner
"Wonderful. . . . A rare, true gift. . . . A traveler of the world, often with her multilingual son, Collinworth waxes intelligently and humorously about other cultures." —Booklist (starred review)
"Collinworth's observations bring the Chinese and their rituals and history to life. . . . Entertaining, informative adventures of a woman determined to understand the people of China." —Kirkus
"An entertaining take on life as a foreigner in China." —Publishers Weekly
About the Author
Eden Collinworth is a former media executive and business consultant. She launched the Los Angeles-based monthly lifestyle magazine, *Buzz*, after which she became VP director of cross media business development at Hearst Corporation. She has been the chief-of-staff of a global think tank and, in 2011, launched Collinworth Associates, a Beijing-based consulting company that specializes in intercultural communication. Her Chinese language book *The Tao of Improving Your Likeability: A Personal Guide to Effective Business Etiquette in Today's Global World* has become a major best seller in mainland China. www.edencollinworth.com
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CHAPTER ONE
The word "etiquette" is rooted in the seventeenth-century gardens of Versailles—one of many reasons the French feel superior. Set in a low valley between two lines of wooded hills, Versailles was the location for Louis XIII's hunting lodge, which he upgraded to chateau status. His son, Louis XIV—determined to build a lasting monument to his own regime—remolded the chateau to an over-the-top level of grandeur. That required a daily workforce of twenty-two thousand men and six

thousand horses, and the exorbitant expense impoverished the country. Before discontent among his citizens festered into rebellion, and rebellion triggered the Revolution, life at court was based on social rank. Versailles was entered by many different gates. Only the lucky few possessing the right to bring their coaches into the great courtyard of the Louvre were granted the right to enter Versailles by way of its main entrance. That left a large number of lower-tiered aristocrats with no immediate access. When Louis XIV's gardener realized it was impossible to prevent those not invited through the front gate from trampling the lawns and flower beds, he put up signs. Already defensive about their lesser point of entry--fearing they were being left behind--the aristocrats ignored the postings, which resulted in a royal decree that no one go beyond the signs without a ticket, known in Old French as *etiquette*. Louis XIV's insistence that his retinue uphold manners had an influence on the bourgeois, and the term *etiquette* became a broader reference to signs of correct behavior. Temporarily banished during the French Revolution, *etiquette* was eventually recalled from exile and it still holds sway. When, after a joint press conference, French president Jacques Chirac muttered into--unbeknownst to him--an open microphone that British prime minister Tony Blair was *mal eleve*, those deadly two words formed the worst kind of insult. The expression translates to "badly brought up" and casts aspersions on not only the offender but also his parents. Though not badly brought up, I certainly can't claim to be a trusted source on *etiquette*, but Gilliam's idea of Western *etiquette* lessons in China would not leave my imagination alone. It nagged at me until I decided to share the idea with a former colleague experienced in evaluating emerging markets. He, too, saw an opportunity. My previous role as an executive at the Hearst Corporation included expanding its many brands. Prior to Hearst, I had implemented the same kind of brand-building strategy for *Buzz*, the L.A. magazine I launched. With contributing editors ranging from Jan Morris to Edmund White, *Buzz* built a reputation for its editorial quality. My partners and I were quick to leverage that reputation by launching *Buzz Weekly*, an arts and entertainment guide, by establishing *Buzz On-Line*, and by founding *Buzz Books*. In order to pursue Gilliam's idea in China, we would first need to build a platform of brand recognition there. What about a book on Western business comportment for the Chinese? I thought. Not too unlikely a consideration, but one requiring a next step. A train of incidents moved me forward: I'd written a novel published the year before. My literary agent, based in London, had an associate in Beijing. That associate was taken by the idea of a book for Chinese about Western business comportment. In a combined state of ignorance and enthusiasm, I resigned as chief of staff at the think tank and moved to Beijing during Gilliam's summer break. That way madness lies, as the English would say, and I would have to agree--it was a fairly mad thing to do. Without a guaranteed source of income, I would be living off my savings; I didn't speak Chinese; and I am far from an authority on manners. In point of fact, this is where I admit to several nasty tendencies, including a knee-jerk reaction to verbally wound those I think deserve the worst of me after they have tortured the best of me, which is my patience. That said, I've always made an effort to veer away from bad behavior and move toward the common sense that is good comportment. I do so because it is a shrewd approach to business and because I believe that there is value in the social contract humans have with one another. To a large degree, our beliefs are instilled by our parents. My parents were of the mind that upholding values required honorable action but, when all else failed, it was sensible to leave the premises. Both were only children who never returned to their places of origin. My father left the South to attend Harvard Business School. His only relative in the North was Sherman Billingsley. After a stint in Leavenworth during Prohibition for distributing liquor in the drugstores he bought for that purpose, Billingsley redeemed himself by creating the Stork Club, a glamorous gathering place for cafe society in New York. My mother was old-world European and a different kind of exile. Like her own mother, she was mentally ill. She was also impeccably mannered. I managed to hold these distinct and, at times, contradictory ideas in my head while sepia-toned propriety dispelled the larger disquiet of what became her progressively frequent stays in mental institutions. She would disappear and then reappear, as if nothing were out of place but time. The fact that she committed herself was never discussed or, indeed, acknowledged. If my professional career carries a credit balance, it can be found in my childhood. The intense ecosystem that was my family consisted of my parents, my two brothers, and me. But there was another, hidden member of our family: silence. And odd as it sounds, our implicit agreement to ignore that which was so obviously wrong enabled me, when it came time, to understand the Asian principle of saving face. It was also my childhood--with its forced introduction to the complexities of human nature--that would equip me, as an adult, to work with a disparate range of people, some considered completely impossible by most others. My father was a success in business. He was also an ethically exacting man. Believing that financial dependency wove a sticky web of complacency, he put my inherited privilege on a timer. Until twenty-one, I was safeguarded by advantages but expected to behave within the strict confines of a nonnegotiable correctness--one that forced my mother's mental illness to hide beneath the surface. Given my remove from the wider world, the only opportunity to learn about the metaphorical scheme of things came from observing anything within my limited line of vision. Improbable as it may seem, that included Maria Callas. My father's board meetings provided family forays from our home in Chicago to a hotel in New York where his company's suite was directly across the hall from the one Aristotle Onassis kept for Callas during the better part of his marriage to Jackie Kennedy. Callas was my equivalent of what Flaubert must have encountered on his first trip to Egypt. Her physical being--splashed in bold, Picasso-like strokes--was wonderfully different from anything I had

known. Having been confined to a life of nuance, I was fascinated by the theatrical exaggeration of hers. Never-ending activity swirled around her. A personal maid coordinated every form of room service. Floral deliveries arrived almost on the hour, and several times a day her white toy poodle--whose coat was trimmed like topiary--was handed to one of the bodyguards for its walk. There was a menacing kind of glamour to Onassis's arrival, announced by the guttural sounds of armed security men who--my mother was quick to point out--didn't know enough to remove their hats while in the elevator. "An ugly little man," was her appraisal of Onassis. "Contemptuously unapologetic for the inconvenience he causes the other guests." My mother's observation was not incorrect. Onassis was a physically unattractive man. Far more interesting to me at thirteen was another fact, just as obvious: Onassis was a married man. That made Callas his mistress. At a time when that word had consequences, one might have thought the degree to which it was public would force a corresponding sense of embarrassment on her. That's what should have happened according to the code of conduct by which I was brought up. But Maria Callas did not appear chastened. Quite the opposite. She was having an extremely good time, and that third irrefutable fact permitted me to consider that life need not be coded to what others believed to be proper behavior. Just as it was with my brothers, the vacuum sound of my father's bank vault closing was heard as I was handed a college diploma. Having no choice in either matter, I had been raised to be--in equal parts--ladylike and employable. The former prepared me for who knows what; the latter provided a lifeline to self-reliance. At twenty-one, my ambitions were focused on New York, but dismal typing skills undermined my opportunities there. I took the only job available to me at the time: a substitute receptionist answering phones at the book publishing company Doubleday. Most callers don't automatically announce themselves, so time after time I was forced to say, "May I ask who is calling?" The second day on the job, that straightforward question might have been reason enough for me to be told not to return for a third day. "Whoever you are, hang up the phone so I can call back and leave a message," were the gruff instructions from an unannounced caller. "I think yours; I'll find me capable of taking a message," I suggested glibly. "The first thing I would ask is the name of the person calling. Who may I ask is calling now?" The ominous silence that followed led me to believe I might have overstepped myself. The literary agent Candida Donadio was a maverick with no formal education but unerring instincts for identifying talent. She was born on October 22, 1929, a date, it is said, memorialized in *Catch-22* and explained by the fact that Joseph Heller was her client. He was but one of them: Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, Philip Roth, John Cheever, Peter Matthiessen, Nelson Algren, and Christopher Isherwood--all were, in some part, due to Candida. A botched phone ploy brought us together. Trying to avoid talking to the Doubleday editor to whom she owed a call, Candida had hoped that, by leaving a message on the machine, she would be relieved of any further obligation. Instead, she got me. Candida was known to like a drink, and the several that had preceded her call allowed the barriers to slip long enough for her to suggest not that she have me fired but that we should meet. The suggestion was out of character for her: Candida was a semirecluse. "To trust is good," she would tell me, and then she would add, "Not to trust is better." Ignoring the width of our age gap, we became close friends. It was she who persuaded me to stake a career in book publishing. Impossible to have imagined, but eight years after my first job as a receptionist--by way of a great deal of luck and relentlessly hard work--I became the head of another publishing company, Arbor House, which, at the time, was part of the Hearst Corporation. Despite my off-topic introduction to Chinese business practices in Shenzhen shortly after I was named publisher, China intrigued me enough to return a year later--by myself and without the intent of doing business. Lured by its 1920s glamour, I spent a week in Shanghai's old Cathay Hotel, whose rooms--festooned with gold silk and lacquered in red--were suffused with an aura of the past. Each afternoon, I took tea in the lobby among the ghosts of courtesans and gangsters. And when it came time to return to New York, I was determined that--be it on business or for the sake of travel--I would come back. I did. Revisiting Shanghai several years later, I took a bullet train from the airport to the center of the city. What fueled my disbelief was not that I was being hurtled ahead at two hundred and sixty-eight miles an hour on the thin layer of air between the train and the magnetized narrow tracks; far more disconcerting was what I saw when we slowed down and I looked out the window: some of the peasants--knee-deep in rice paddies--were on cell phones. Entering the telecommunications market with satellite-based platforms, China managed to leapfrog over the first generation of cable-based systems in the West, and now over 75 percent of its 1.3 billion--plus people have at least one cell phone. It could be the sheer number of people in China trying to have their say, but shrill voices--often combined with spittle spray--come across several decimals higher than is comfortable to Westerners. Noise accompanies one everywhere in China; there is practicality to the customary phone greeting *wei*, which means "Can you hear me?" or "Is anyone there?" Even after my third trip to China, the country continued to baffle. Its social rules were puzzling. Its business agreements were revocable. Its people were accessible and, at the same time, unreachable. Whenever a Sinophile would explain Chinese culture, my response was always the same polite "I see," although I didn't quite. Chinese history was too full of incident for a tidy explanation. I wanted a better understanding, and my mind kept circling back. Like a complicated mathematical equation I was determined to solve, China called me back numerous times over the next twenty-five years. There came

many adventures, but only one revelation: I would remain forever and beguilingly mystified by the Middle Kingdom.