

## English butler leads China's latest cultural revolution

### 1 Lead-in

1. Look at the two dictionary definition below. What do you think the link is between the two?

**The Cultural Revolution** noun [C] A period of great social and political change during the 1960s and early 1970s in China.

**butler** noun [C] The most important male servant in a rich person's house, whose job is to organize the other servants, welcome guests, to pour wine at meals etc.

2. Look at the words below. Which would you connect with *The Cultural Revolution* and which would you connect with *butler*? Use a dictionary to look up words you don't know.

class traitor    etiquette    hotels    state  
communist    luxury    service industry

### 2 Reading 1

1. Now read the first sentence from the newspaper article and check your ideas.

Chinese tourist chiefs and luxury hotel managers are reinterpreting the old communist dictum *Serve the People* with help from an unusual source: an English butler.

2. What do you think the rest of the article will say?

3. Read the article and check your ideas.

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By Jonathan Watts in Beijing

Chinese tourist chiefs and luxury hotel managers are reinterpreting the old communist dictum *Serve the People* with help from an unusual source: an English butler.

When Robert Watson entered service in 1974, China was in the midst of the Cultural Revolution. If he had gone to Beijing at that time, his profession would have called him a class traitor. Polite manners would have been dismissed as devices used to maintain a social hierarchy. Today, however, he has been recruited by the authorities to instruct local staff in the finer points of etiquette and customer satisfaction in response to a boom in the five-star service industry and an expected increase in high-rolling tourists and wealthy investors. With a surging economy, an influx of foreign professionals and a campaign to improve manners ahead of the Olympics in 2008, Beijing is calling on outside expertise to lift the standards of its service sector. Mr Watson served at a private home and the Lanesborough Hotel in London before embarking on a jet-setting career as founder and director of the Guild of Professional English Butlers.

With international salaries for top manservants as high as \$160,000 a year, his advice does not come cheap. The cost of his courses, which can cover anything from traditional white-glove service to modern hotel management, range from \$3,500 to \$10,000 a week. In the past 10 years he has arranged visits to top tailors, organised lectures by toastmasters and wine specialists and run training programmes in Las Vegas, the Caribbean, Saudi Arabia and Mexico. Mr Watson was hired by Beijing Tourism Group, which operates state-owned hotels and sightseeing facilities in the capital. He also ran a five-day course for 20 staff of a

private luxury development. Towering over his students and cracking jokes, the Englishman came across as more Basil Fawlty than Jeeves, but he said the modern global age requires more than the stiff formality of the traditional butler.

"Throughout the world the big market is new money: people who have bought lots of luxury items but lack staff who know how to clean and use them properly. They need experts who can do this and organise superb dinner parties with all the right food and drinks," he said. "We need to educate wealthy Chinese about the value of having a butler. It not only enhances their status, it means that they have someone to organise their lives in the way they want. This market could be huge. China is the destination now, and it will be for years to come. Hotel work will spiral and so will the market for property management. There are huge numbers of luxury apartments in Beijing but no one with great skill to service them."

According to the World Tourism Organisation, China will be the world's leading tourist destination by 2020, generating an income of more than 3.6 trillion yuan (\$460bn). The rising clout of China's new rich has led to an explosion in the number of luxury businesses, such as the Pine Valley golf club near the Great Wall, which features courses designed by Jack Nicklaus and a presidential suite with a 24-hour butler service. "All this is new to us . . . the concept of private ownership is only 20 years old in China. Before that everything was owned by the state or the collective," said Tony Azarias, general manager of L'Accueil Resident, a luxury property-management company that has hired Mr Watson to train staff. The Taiwanese-owned firm is about to open a development in Beijing's upmarket Zhongguangcun district; the price of one-bedroom serviced suites starts at \$125,000. *(continued on following page)*

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Mr Azarias believes a week's staff training with a British butler will add value. "The five-star hotel business is very competitive. We must find new ways to enhance our service." Mr Watson's trainees appeared to be enjoying their re-education. "In the old days our concept of service was very basic,"

said Frankle Guo, a 25-year-old reception manager. "It was just a job. We didn't try to anticipate what our customers wanted. But Robert has really opened my mind. He's shown me how to put the 'Wow!' factor into service."

*The Guardian Weekly 6/11/05, page 17*

### Glossary

Basil Fawlty – a character from a British comedy programme.

Jeeves – the name of the butler in many stories by the British write P.G. Woodhouse.

Toastmaster – someone who introduces the speaker at a formal meal.

## 3 Reading 2

### 1. Read the article again. Why are these numbers important?

1974	2008	160,000	3,500 to 10,000
2020	460 billion		25

### 2. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- There has been an increase in tourism to China in the last five years.
- Robert Watson now works as a butler in a London Hotel.
- It is not expensive to hire his services.
- He has run courses and given talks in different countries.
- Mr Watson thinks that having a butler is not just a status symbol.
- The number of rich people in China is decreasing.
- L'Accueil Resident is a Taiwanese company.
- Frankle Guo has been on a course run by Robert Watson.

## 4 Vocabulary in context

### 1. Find the words below in the article and then choose the correct meaning from the context.

- finer points
  - small details that are difficult to notice
  - something that is good quality
- boom
  - a loud sound
  - an increase in success or popularity
- surging
  - a sudden and large increase
  - a sudden movement of a large group of people

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- 4) influx
  - a) something unpleasant
  - b) a large number of people coming to a particular place
- 5) embarking
  - a) starting a new project or activity
  - b) getting on a ship
- 6) towering
  - a) much taller than the other people around
  - b) very impressive or important
- 7) cracking
  - a) telling or making something
  - b) losing control
- 8) enhance
  - a) to make something more effective
  - b) to improve or add value to something
- 9) spiral
  - a) to get worse
  - b) to increase quickly
- 10) clout
  - a) power or influence over events
  - b) to hit something hard

### 2. Can you explain the following phrases from the text?

- a) Serve the People
- b) ...put the 'Wow!' factor into service

## 5 Follow-up

**Read the opinions, and decide which ones you agree with. Then discuss them with other students.**

- 1 Knowing how to organize superb dinner parties with all the right food and drinks is an important social and business skill.
- 2 It is useful to be able to anticipate what customers might want and need when you work in a hotel.
- 3 It is useful to have someone like a butler to help you organize your life.
- 4 It is important to know the correct etiquette.

### Glossary

**etiquette** noun [C] a set of rules for behaving correctly in different social situations or rules about behaviour for people in a particular job.