

D59 Charlotte / Germany / Literary Studies

Interaction partner(s): Chinese female student

Moment of enquiry: SS 08

Experience of difference: Symbolic manifestations of gratitude and appreciation

German student Charlotte is about to spend a semester abroad in Ireland and is preparing for her departure. She shares her apartment with Dan, a Chinese woman, and three other students. The relationship between Charlotte and Dan is somewhat distant; they talk only occasionally when they run into each other in the kitchen. A day before Charlotte's departure for Ireland, they run into each other and Dan asks when Charlotte is leaving. When she hears that Charlotte will be leaving in two days, she runs to her room and returns with a small package, which she hands to the German. Charlotte opens the present, unwrapping a richly decorated bracelet. Dan explains that the lion on the bracelet is for good luck. Charlotte is very pleased, puts the bracelet on immediately, thanks and hugs Dan. This clearly makes the Chinese uncomfortable, and though she laughs, she dodges Charlotte's hug and quickly disappears in her room. Now Charlotte thinks that she, too, should give her roommate a gift. She buys a big candle and wraps it in pretty black-and-white paper. She knocks on Dan's door and hands her the gift with a "Here, I've got a little gift for you." The Chinese student thanks her curtly and quickly goes back to her room. The German feels like she's done something wrong but can't figure out what.

1. What are the German student's behaviour conventions for accepting the gift? Why does she feel obligated to give the Chinese student a present?
2. What is it about the German's behaviour that irritates the Chinese student and why?