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HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS Michael Knapp

Is the Grinch still trying to steal Christmas? *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a classic book by Dr. Seuss that later became a TV animated movie and eventually a live-action feature film. As the story goes, the Grinch was a green monster-like character who hated Christmas. Irritated by the sound of Christmas songs and all of the festivities related to the holiday, the Grinch devised a plan to put an end to Christmas by stealing everyone's presents. You'll have to read the book or watch the movie or cartoon to catch the rest of the story, but sadly the Grinch appears to be alive and well today.



The Grinch
(Public Domain)



Christmas greeting on a cup in a Beijing coffee shop, where the Grinch has not stolen Christmas

The holiday season is a great time to be in China. In today's "politically correct" American environment, people nervously go about trying not to offend overly sensitive people. And it seems almost every special-interest group has something to be offended about. Sadly, Christmas has rapidly been removed from many institutions simply over the fear of offending someone. American public schools are an example of this nonsense.

It all started with the banning of many school choirs from singing any Christmas songs that had "religious" meaning. The Supreme Court recognized the cultural significance of these traditional Christmas carols, but school boards have still caved in under the pressure of tiny segments of society that represent the Grinch. The Grinch has misinterpreted the American constitution's separation of church and state, and used it to "steal Christmas."

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Now, in many school districts, the Grinch has even banned traditional "Merry Christmas" greetings. What used to be called school music concerts are now called "winter concerts," and even the mention of Christmas at these celebrations is prohibited. It's no wonder so many American families are sending their kids to private schools or just schooling them at home.

Schools aren't the only place the Grinch as stolen Christmas. Some coffee shops, retail stores, and other businesses have stopped using the word, "Christmas." Starbucks, which is no longer my favorite coffee shop, only uses the word, "holiday." Last year, a passenger had to be removed from an airplane because he flew into a rage after flight attendants greeted him with, "Merry Christmas" (Fox News, Dec. 26, 2-14). Now, even employees on airplanes have to be careful about using this cheerful greeting, lest they offend some overly sensitive Grinch. I'm so happy I can freely enjoy greeting my Chinese friends with a joyous "Merry Christmas!"

Negative responses to “Merry Christmas,” come in many bitter forms. The angry airplane passenger shouted, “I don’t celebrate Christmas!” Another pathetic reaction is, “I’m not a Christian, so don’t wish me a Merry Christmas.” In a corrupt world, people always find reasons to be bitter. So far in China, my “Merry Christmas” greeting has almost always been replied to with, “Merry Christmas to you too,” and even the few who don’t say these words respond with a smile. But to be fair to my own country, I have never personally received a bitter response to my Christmas greeting in America, but the media sometimes paints a grim picture of the holiday.

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If it ever does happen to me, if my “Merry Christmas” is greeted with an angry, “I’m not a Christian, I don’t celebrate Christmas,” I have my response ready: “I’m not Chinese either, but I celebrate Chinese New Year.”

Everybody has their set of beliefs, but that doesn’t excuse bitter criticism of people who celebrate holidays that don’t fit into what we believe in. My faith runs contrary to some of the symbolism of Halloween, but I won’t lose my temper if you wish me a “Happy Halloween.” I do not believe in the Chinese Nian Monster, nor am I persuaded that fireworks can scare away evil spirits. But, in the midst of all the celebration, I’ll be glad to wish you a “Happy Chinese New Year.” Chinese New Year is part of China’s culture, and Christmas is an integral part of western Culture.

Two thousand years ago, a baby was born, and today we celebrate his birthday with a holiday called Christmas. Christians believe this baby was the Son of God who came into the world to save us from our sins. But if an atheist wants to believe this baby was only an ordinary child, they are free to believe what they like, but there is no denying this baby’s birthday has become an icon of western culture. Some choose to leave the historical, or “religious,” aspects out and just decorate Christmas trees and buy gifts, which is fine, but don’t tell me Christmas cannot be celebrated or that I cannot say, “Merry Christmas.”

This brings me back to one of the reasons I love being in China. Compared to America, Christmas is relatively new here. When I first moved to China, it was hard to find a Christmas tree. Now shopping malls, restaurants, coffee shops, and even some schools, are decked out for Christmas. It’s refreshing to hear Christmas music in Beijing’s Maan Coffee shop and other venues. On the one hand, I hate to see an invasion of western culture in China, but on the other hand, if Chinese people want to celebrate, let them.



Christmas Greeting Sign at Beijing, Shunyi’s Pinnacle Plaza

Chinese love celebrations. They celebrate Chinese New Year, Dragon Boat Festival, Moon Cake Festival, even November 11 shopping-on-line day! It should be no surprise that today’s Chinese people are celebrating Christmas. My advice to Chinese people is simple: *Enjoy the holiday and don’t let the Grinch steal your Christmas joy!*

I have only one thing to say to the Grinch who stole Christmas: “Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!”



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CHRISTMAS IN CHINA!

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