

Firing back at the 'map cannon'

Regional prejudice is rife in China, and self-slander can be an effective tool to counter the bias

By SUN JIHUA
The World of Chinese

Where are you from?" can be a dangerous question. From the crafty image of coastal southerners to northerners' reputation as yokels, social interaction in China is rife with regional prejudice. The habit of stereotyping people by geography is called "地域黑" (dì tú hēi, regional slander) or more evocatively, "地图炮" (dì tú pào, map cannon).

Whether food or clothing, housing or traveling habits, no aspect of life is out of bounds for the bigot brigade. But rather than arguing or reasoning with their slanderers, some people have found 自黑 (zì hēi, self-slander) to be an effective and humorous weapon against bias.

Take South China's Guangdong province, whose people are said to consume anything that moves, flies or swims.

This stereotype is neither true nor a compliment. But, rather than deny it, Cantonese people often add fuel to the fire by invoking another phrase — 广东人吃福建人 (guǎng dōng rén chī fú jiàn rén, Cantonese people eat Fujianese people). This meme started during the 2017 Spring Festival season, when the following chat thread between a Fujianese man and his Cantonese friend went viral:

A: I heard that you Cantonese people ...
Tīng shuō nǐ men guǎng dōng rén ...
听说你们广东人.....

B: Particularly love to eat Fujianese people.
Tè bié ài chī fú jiàn rén.
特别爱吃福建人。

Other Cantonese jumped on the bandwagon.

People ask me what's the most famous dish in Cantonese cuisine; I say, Fujianese people.

Yǒu rén wèn wǒ, yuè cài lǐ shén me zuì yǒu míng? wǒ shuō, fú jiàn rén.
有人问我，粤菜里什么最有名？我说，福建人。

Once, I went to Fujian and my mouth didn't stop watering!

Wǒ yǒu yī cì qù le fú jiàn, zhēn shì rěn bù zhù liú kǒu shuǐ!
我有一次去了福建，真是忍不住流口水！

The edible Fujianese are themselves targets of geographic mockery, thanks to their accent. Influenced by local dialects, the stereotypical Fujian natives mix up their f's and h's when speaking Mandarin. The Fujianese take it in their stride, though, jokingly calling themselves "胡建人" (hú jiàn rén, Hujianese):

When we Hujianese laugh, we go "fafafa".
Wǒ men hú jiàn rén xiào qǐ lái dōu shì "fāfā" de.
我们胡建人笑起来都是“发发发”的。

People from Dongbei (东北, dōng běi, Northeast China), shorthand for the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang, are considered uncouth barbarians. Their eating habits are deemed unhealthy — barbecue meat for every meal — and fashion sense restricted to furs and gold chains.



dì tú hēi, regional slander

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

You may want to keep your mouth shut about all that, though, as a wrong remark or askance look could spark a fight with the reputedly violent Dongbei native. But one of the northeasterners' traits is grudgingly admired by other Chinese: Their tolerance for alcohol.

You are from Dongbei, you must be good at drinking!
Nǐ shì dōng běi rén, kěn dìng hěn néng hē!
你是东北人，肯定很能喝！

What should a poor Dongbei nondrinker do? Use another stereotype as a shield:

I don't dare get drunk, or my wife will beat me to death.

Wǒ kě bù gǎn hē duō, yào bù rán wǒ lǎo pō huì dǎ sǐ wǒ.
我可不敢喝多，要不然我老婆会打死我。

Similar views are directed at North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, romanticized as a vast grassland populated by nomads. Residents sick of explaining their housing con-

ditions (apartments), means of transportation (not horseback) and economy (quite modern) to outsiders would rather say:

I have lived in a yurt since I was a kid and never seen a building; I ride a horse to school every day, grazing dairy cows on the way; if I run out of money, I knit sweaters to sell.

Wǒ cóng xiǎo zhù měng gǔ bāo, méi jiàn guò lóu fáng; měi tiān shàng xué dōu shì qí mǎ qù, shùn biàn fàng yī xià nǎi niú; yào shì méi qián le, jiù zhī diǎn yáng máo shān qù mài.
我从小住蒙古包，没见过楼房；每天上学都是骑马去，顺便放一下奶牛；要是没钱了，就织点儿羊毛衫去卖。

People in Northwest China's Gansu province may sympathize; their province is typically imagined as a barren, lifeless desert. Their response?

That's right. We bathe only once a year and our only means of transportation is the camel.
Méi cuò, wǒ men yī nián zhǐ xǐ yī cì zǎo, wéi yī de jiāo tōng gōng jù shì luò tuo.

没错，我们一年只洗一次澡，唯一的交通工具是骆驼。

Not far off, the northern province of Shanxi is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. However, Shanxi is also known for its rich coal deposits, which has made the fortune of many a crooked "煤老板" (méi lǎo bǎn, mine boss).

Shanxi folks are often asked: "你家里有矿吗?" (Nǐ jiā lǐ yǒu kuàng ma? Does your family own a coal mine?) Here's an effective reply:

Too many! Even the wind in our backyard is black!

Nà kě tài duō le! Wǒ men jiā lián hòu yuàn de fēng dōu shì hēi de!
那可太多了！我们家连后院的風都是黑的！

By contrast, Wenzhou in the eastern Zhejiang province is believed to be filled with wealthy entrepreneurs. Faced with accusing glares from those who cannot afford to buy a house, what's a Wenzhou native to do? Why, humblebrag, of course:

We, the people of Wenzhou, have decided to take half the responsibility for the nation's skyrocketing housing prices.

Wǒ men wēn zhōu rén jué dìng wèi quán guó fáng jià shàng zhǎng fù yī bàn zé rèn.
我们温州人决定为全国房价上涨负一半责任。

Still, arguably the most maligned province of China is none of the above: Step forward, Henan. The natives of the Central China province once had a reputation for being "honest, frank and rule-abiding"; at least according to an academic survey in the 1960s.

But within three decades, a series of scandals had badly damaged the populous province's reputation. For some reason, the theft of manhole covers is associated with the Henanese, who might self-deprecatingly claim:

The manhole cover is our provincial currency. When we turn 18, we need to steal 18 covers or we aren't considered adults.

Jīng gài shì wǒ men de liú tōng huò bì. Wǒ men shí bā suì de shí hou déi tōu shí bā gè jīng gài, yào bù rán bù suàn chéng nián.
井盖是我们省的流通货币。我们十八岁的时候得偷十八个井盖，要不然不算成年。

It is in southwestern Yunnan, though, that out-of-towners might surreptitiously approach the locals about another "currency":

Is it really easy to buy drugs in your hometown?
Zài nǐ men jiā nàr mǎi dú pǐn zhēn de hěn róng yì ma?
在你们家那儿买毒品真的很容易吗？

Of course, you can even order them for take-out!

Dāng rán, hái kě yǐ jiào wài mài ne!
当然，还可以叫外卖呢！

It almost appears as if no province is without flaw, but at least all are as good or bad as each other.

Courtesy of The World of Chinese;
www.theworldofchinese.com