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MY TURN

■ **Wayne Chan**



The dreaded "follow-up question"

May wife and I recently travelled to Taiwan to visit our families.

It was a terrific trip, especially since we haven't been able to visit for a few years due to the pandemic. The one downside that I nearly forgot about after all this time away immediately reared it's ugly head the first time Maya and I went out to buy a few things.

I call it, "The dreaded follow-up question."

OK, this calls for a little explanation on the backstory. I owe you that.

I speak some Chinese. I'm actually proud of it. But I don't really read or write. I can't blame my parents. My mom sent me, year after year, to Chinese school, and I went. The problem was that I went to Chinese school for completely different reasons. I didn't attend to improve my Chinese language skills. I went there to be with my schoolmates, many of whom were cute, Chinese-American girls.

So basically, the bulk of my Chinese language education was purposely learning Chinese phrases like, "What are you doing after class?" or "You're an Aquarius? So am I!"

The limited success of my Chinese language education meant that what I did learn was mostly from my parents. My mom spoke perfect English, but I suspect she spoke to me in Chinese because deep down she knew that was the only way I would actually pick up *ANYTHING*.

So, for the record, I perfectly understand Chinese phrases like, "How many times have I told you to clean up your room?!" and "No more TV until you finish your homework!"

But back to my trip to Taiwan.

I needed to buy a hat. Specifically, a baseball cap.

Being spring in Taiwan, I normally bring a baseball cap to keep the sun out of my eyes. So, on the first daily walk of our trip, we went by an active wear store and I thought it was the perfect opportunity to buy a baseball cap.

Maya, who is from Taiwan and speaks perfect Chinese, went off shopping on her own. I didn't see

many hats in the area, but no problem — I knew what I wanted and most importantly, how to ask for it.

I walked to a salesperson in one of the aisles and confidently asked, in Chinese, "Where do you sell all of your hats?"

This is when the dreaded follow-up questions began. The deeper I get into a back-and-forth about any particular topic, the less I understand what we're talking about. At some point in the conversation, we could be talking about a "Cocker Spaniel field hockey competition" and I would never know the difference.

Here's a snippet of my back-and-forth Chinese conversation with the salesperson and how her responses sounded to me.

Me: Where do you sell all of your hats?

Salesperson: What style hat are you looking for? Are you looking for BLOOPITY BLOOP or POPPITY POP?

Me: I'm sorry — what?

Salesperson: Oh, it depends on what kind of hat you're looking for. If you're looking for KLAKITY KLACK, those are on the second floor, but the regular GOBBITY GOOK is here on the main floor. Maybe we should start on the first floor with the FLIPPITY FLOPS.

Me: That would be fine.

It's amazing what we settle for when we don't want to admit we have no idea what is going on.

In the end, I did end up buying a hat. It wasn't really the color or style I was looking for, but it would do. It's a good thing I could at least take a look at the hat before buying it. Otherwise, I could've easily come home wearing a Bowler hat or a pink, floral sun chapeau.

I can imagine the comments of my friends wearing one of those upon returning home.

Friend: Nice hat, Wayne!

Me: Why don't you shut your CLIPPITY CLAP!

Humor writer Wayne Chan lives in the San Diego area; cartoonist Wayne Chan is based in the Bay Area.



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