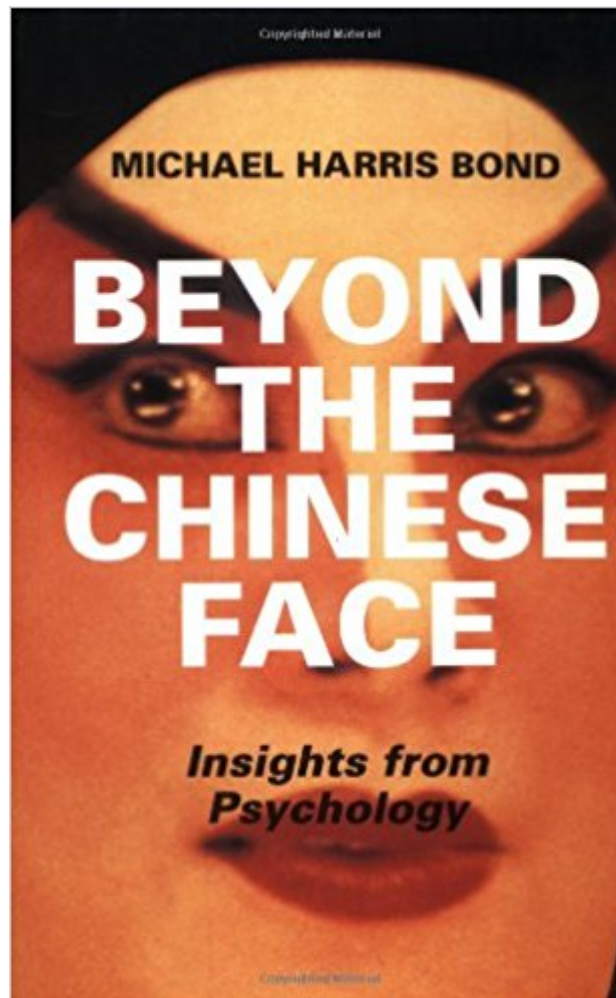




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Beyond The Chinese Face: Insights From Psychology



Synopsis

Are the Chinese people unique? How can we compare the Chinese with other groups? Are the Chinese more concerned with "face" than other people? How can we explain the relative academic success of immigrant Chinese students? What is the impact of learning an ideographic script on the Chinese people's way of thinking and perceiving? Are the Chinese more or less family centered than other national groups? How can we understand Chinese negotiating techniques? Questions such as these have long fascinated people with an interest in China. In this book Michael Bond, a western psychologist, draws on nearly twenty years' experience of studying the Chinese people to provide insights which will be valuable to westerners and Chinese alike. Clear, concise, and free from jargon or technical language, this is the book for anyone who wants to understand Chinese people, whether for day-to-day social interaction, teaching, counseling, or for business dealings.

Book Information

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"Clever and persuasive....As an initial reference book it is invaluable." --The Times Literary Supplement
"A highly readable, engaging book that is full of practical insights into the Chinese people. It reveals the author's extensive experience and wisdom. He has distilled the best empirical research into relevant and useful information about the Chinese. It should be noted that he has accomplished this with an unusual balance between methodological rigor and common sense....I found [it] to be a very practical and useful book. I highly recommend it to scholars and individuals interested in understanding the Chinese psyche. In providing insight into the psychology of the Chinese, it will go a long way to making obsolete the stereotype of them as a very 'inscrutable'."

people." --China Review International

Michael Harris Bond, Reader, Department of Psychology, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

I probably should rate this book lower, but I think the author did a good job with his research and the text is actually written reasonably well. I found it fascinating that a Canadian author should mostly use American statistics to compare data with Chinese society, but then... our northern brethren do largely share our culture, history and heritage, whether they are all always all that comfortable with that fact or not. In any case, I think the book was written with very good intentions and may have even arisen out of the same sense of frustration I often felt while interacting with the Chinese in Taiwan for five and half years (and later, the Mainland Chinese of Shanghai for six months). "Why is it," I seemed to constantly be asking myself in those days (and still, to this very day in Korea sometimes, really), "that so many of these people don't ever seem to say what they mean, much less mean what they say?" The book begins well enough by very politely and safely outlining various aspects of this subject, but therein lies the rub. In the end, the author simply doesn't take any chances. He doesn't really satisfactorily answer any of the questions he posits and one is left feeling that he should have asked some tougher questions. In other words, he brings the subject up, but fails to really explain or make any truly challenging suppositions about it. Instead, he comes off as not being bold enough to come out and say what the book is really all about. Which is, "What's behind this whole 'lying to save face' thing?" But then, I think I totally understand how this book ended up feeling so inconclusive and unsatisfyingly, pathetically politically correct. For how does one write about a large, "homogeneous" group of people and a very obvious behavioral aspect of their society, WITHOUT coming off as "racist" at worst, or at the very best, culturally intolerant? In other words, the author handles the whole subject with kid gloves, and quietly and carefully, at times, whines about it even. You can feel his sense of frustration, living and working in Hong Kong, yet having been born and raised in a nice, clean country with a small population like Canada. But he still fails to take any real chances here. He hugs the sidelines and the book ends up seeming all too brief. Perhaps even lame and terribly impotent with its halfhearted devil's advocacy, used to rationalize the Chinese concept of face. I read the book twice (and even began a third reading), looking for answers... or any sort of consolation, really. But none that I could discern was forthcoming. I do think the author should be commended for making a solid effort to address the issue, however. And who knows? Maybe he was over-edited. But probably more self censored than anything, I suspect. Don't know, but the book just sort of limps along and skirts the issue and that,

I'm afraid, makes it a more frustrating read than anything. It's almost like reading about military strategy in the Vietnam War. Sort of like, "Well, we're here in force. But... we don't really wanna upset the Chinese people, since... they might just enter the war in large numbers, the way they did in Korea and really, really upset the balance... so... we're just gonna kinda... be here for a while... and slowly bleed out." Ultimately, 'Beyond the Chinese Face' is just like that really; a little, hemming and hawing undeclared war of attrition that leaves one feeling more frustrated and unfulfilled than anything else.

I think the reader from Victoria, BC, Canada was probably most right here in this forum. You have to know what you can expect and what you cannot. What you cannot expect here, is a guide to the thinking of around 1,5 billion people, because that is the number of people we're talking about. And they are very very different, I would dare to say more different than any other ethnic (can we say so?) group worldwide: you have ABCs (American born Chinese), their parents and certainly CBCs, Aussie BCs and so on. There are Singapore-Chinese and overseas Chinese in other Asian countries. Taiwan Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. And then there is this huge mainland area with around 1.3 billion Chinese, where the living conditions differ so greatly that it's hard to imagine for anyone who hasn't been there. All those people are Chinese, but they all have different backgrounds: capitalistic system or planned economy (though even the mainland is shifting very quickly towards capitalism, stronger than outsiders usually see), freedom of speech or getting killed for speaking out the truth, diversity or open hate from other societal groups (e.g. Indonesia) and so on and so on. And then there is the fact that people differ even within a society, with the result that you could very easily meet Chinese people from, say Beijing, who are very open sexual and have more sexual experience than, say, an American 30 year old who never had a girlfriend. Nevertheless it's a fact that most Chinese are not like that but instead having less sexual experience than their western counterparts (I'm not judging this, just stating the fact as the book says it and also as my own experience supports it). Now, one could say (and 3 other readers did so) that this book is therefore useless. I strongly disagree. First of all the author states exactly this fact at the beginning and warns about generalisations (as every psychological book should do so). Second the information he gives is in around 95 % of the cases supported by my own experience (nationality: German; 8 months living in Hong Kong, studying Business and Chinese and working, travelling on the mainland to Shanghai/ Beijing/ Guangzhou/ Shenzhen, also having lived in the US for 6 months meeting quite a few ABCs,). So use this guide as a background information but not as a "now I know everything about Chinese"- guidebook. Nobody will ever know everything about the Chinese, simply because

there are no "Chinese" as such. But this is the general problem of all social sciences where there is no $1+1=2$ like in maths. Knowing that, this book helps you a bit and gives you quite a few "I see!"s on your journey into the fascinating Chinese culture (which is indeed possible for a non-Chinese although the reader from San Francisco obviously doesn't think so). Therefore I rate the book 5 star because it delivers what it promises and this is how I define quality.

I have now been working in Hong Kong for nearly four months. A colleague lent me 'Beyond the Chinese Face' in my first week here in Hong Kong. I have lived in several different countries and cultures, and so have at least an intellectual understanding of different perspectives and ways of seeing the world. But it is amazing how unhelpful one's intellectual awarenesses are when faced with understanding actual events or situations in a new cultural setting. What 'Beyond the Chinese Face' managed to do for me was to assist me in building a framework in which to understand what I observed on a daily basis. By enabling me to feel that I understood more about the context I was in, I felt more relaxed, and so was able to engage with different customs and rules more easily. Even Hong Kong bureaucracy became more comprehensible! I liked the fact that the book made it clear that many of the existing research studies are flawed, but the overall patterns emerging from research were clearly laid out. It was refreshing also to read a book that was based on academic research but was written in a style that was accessible and easy to read. If only more academic writing were like this! This is a valuable resource for all newcomers to Hong Kong. Thanks, Michael.

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