Getting Along With the Chinese

for fun and profit

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Fred Schneiter has written an entertaining and highly informative guide to China, explaining how to work and play with the Chinese. With an unfailing sense of humor, Schneiter offers insights for Sinophiles, Sinophobes, and everyone in between.

Schneiter delves into the lighter side of Chinese psychology and in doing so demystifies one of the toughest markets in the world. He explains when you should and how you can apply pressure, why patience is not quite the overriding consideration it is generally perceived to be, and what to do and what *not* to do when hosting Chinese guests.

Fred Schneiter is the Hong Kong-based Vice President for Market Development in China of US Wheat Associates. Over the last three decades he has worked in *every* province of China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, (as well as Vietnam, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines) introducing pizza, hamburgers and sandwiches and modernizing the noodle, baking and milling industries.

Getting Along With the Chinese sums up what he learned along the way.

"An essential item to pack in your 'China survival kit' "

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"Facts on China no degree of study can give"

The Shanghai Star

"Offers American readers the chance to understand the Chinese — and themselves — better"

The Oregonian

Also by Fred Schneiter:

The Taste of Old Hong Kong

Getting Along With the Chinese

for fun and profit

FRED SCHNEITER

Illustrated by Larry Feign

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To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion.
— ROBERT BURNS

It is wisdom to know others.
— LAO TZU

The human nature of people is similar.
— CONFUCIUS

I'm astounded by people who want to "know" the universe,
when it's hard enough to find your way around
Chinatown.
— WOODY ALLEN

To those who sometimes make some effort
to see the other person's point of view.

Acknowledgements

As this expanded and updated second edition takes flight around the world I must express appreciation to those who helped bring it about. First, to Pete Spurrier, publisher of Blacksmith Books of Hong Kong, who came up with the idea for taking on the challenge of a second edition rather than simply going for an eleventh international printing. And to Alan Sargent, Pete's editor, who fortuitously and coincidentally happened to have edited the original manuscript with me some twenty years ago. Alan whittled and polished it after editor Jan Krikke saw something salvageable in my submission. Candy Tong, who helped enhance my *The Taste of Old Hong Kong,* published in 2014, added her welcome and polished touch to this Second Edition as well. Then there's author/journalist Don Kirk who recommended I submit the manuscript to Blacksmith Books. And how could I fail to mention my indomitable wife, The Lovely Charlene, who, after all these years remains my most ardent advocate. She and my resourceful neighbor-gurus Jan Clark, Michael Lie and Bob McQuown, all of whom understand more about computers than I really care to know, helped keep my old Samsung from toying with my emotions.

In acknowledging those—mainly innocent bystanders—whose inputs helped enliven the best-selling first edition, I owe much to Chinese friends, associates, acquaintances and indulgent strangers who graciously, and with candor, put up with all my pestering questions about things Chinese over the decades.

Also I must acknowledge all the non-Chinese who, usually unwittingly, provided ideas, guidance, gusto, and more than an occasional gaffe or guffaw. My indefatigable wife put up with the long hours of seclusion that goes along with trying to convert brain waves into ink.

Distinguished China Hands Donald Anderson, Ambassador Burton Levin and Ambassador Richard Williams graciously reviewed the final draft and shared important insights. So did McDonald's Hong Kong Managing Director Daniel Ng, who opened the first two McDonald's in the People's Republic of China. China hand and author Dennis Leventhal and wife Mary—longtime friends in both Taipei and Hong Kong—contributed invaluable counsel from the first sketchy scribbles and stuck with me all the way through. Asia publishing professionals Mike Morrow and Jan Krikke provided energizing enthusiasm in the project's earliest days. Editor Alan Sargent helped put it on the *South China Morning Post*'s best-seller list for a solid year.

Hopefully, bookshop browsers *will* judge this book by its cover, and illustrations, from the pen of Hong Kong's premier cartoonist, Larry Feign, a man blessed with the Confucian quality of seeing both sides of everything. Lam Chung Ying inspired me stoically through it all, a reincarnate and untiring Chinese Socrates to my pesky Plato.

Contents

Prologue

Since Marco Polo came up with the idea of writing about China, we've had all manner of them-and-us books, adventure stories, anthropological/socio-political/economic/historical research works, travel guides, cookbooks and I don't know what all. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* continues to appear under a variety of guises, almost as regularly as the return of the wild goose. And have you noticed how all books about China seem to tilt either toward the theme of the Wonderful Chinese or the Wily Chinese? This isn't one of those, nor is it a "new management book" dedicated to the wisdom of trying to outwit the Chinese. This is a lighthearted little offering, written in the hope that it may contribute toward a better understanding of the Chinese, and perhaps make some small contribution toward the realization of our largely untapped mutualities.

I've had Chinese classmates, friends and neighbors since the first grade, the year Franklin D. Roosevelt became President. That was an era when Americans knew virtually nothing of substance about the Chinese, aside from what they could work out from the evil doings of Fu Manchu and Flash Gordon's archenemy, Ming the Merciless. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was seen by his wartime ally, Roosevelt, as "the first real Oriental" he had met. Fate afforded me a broader perspective. My high school was on the fringe of San Francisco's Chinatown and the year I graduated, seventy Chinese students—a quarter of the class—received their diplomas. Galileo High likely had more Chinese than any public high school in the country. Most of the rest of the kids were Italians from nearby "Little Italy." (In high school, it was never a question of being in the minority. I *was* the minority.) The past twenty-eight years I've lived in the Orient, working on the development and modernization of the wheat food industry. Most of that time was spent working directly with government and business people under the

Chinese Nationalist regime in Taiwan, and (since 1981) has involved, exclusively, the People's Republic of China. And, before anybody even knew there was such a thing, in 1968 I was one of the world's first distributors of Hong Kong flu.

My hope is the following impressions and recollections may serve as something of your own personal Rosetta Stone to enhance your understanding of China and the Chinese. And while I haven't used a Rosetta Stone, my "romanticized" spelling of Chinese words follows no formal system, but attempts to be consistent with local usage and historical context. This includes famous old brand names which retain their traditional spelling.

The book is intended for homebodies, students, tourists, managers, teachers, backpackers, traders, writers, and anyone else interested in a better understanding of how the Chinese see things. Acquiring a better grasp of the Chinese thought process requires little more than an open mind and an inquiring perspective. If that sounds like you, read on.

A fair amount of space is devoted to the critical business of what offends or pleases the Chinese. While there's no guarantee we can get along better with someone just because we understand them, we can't expect to get far—individually or collectively—if we don't try.

I didn't make up any of this. What I didn't personally experience, was picked up principally from the Chinese themselves and from diplomats, and a wide assortment of friends and associates who have spent years in the Orient. In the event you encounter an occasional contradiction—I'm sorry; that's how China is. As Amy Tan, author, says of China, "pick your truths very carefully."

Despite apparent differences between the Chinese and the rest of us, we surely would be very much like them if our histories had been similar. And, really, the rest of us aren't all that much unlike them.

That brings us to a Chinese proverb about our mutual potentials:

Where there is a stairway it should be used

Who Do They Think They Are?

Seeing the World through Almond Eyes

After twenty-eight years in the Orient, I'm starting to get some things figured out. Presently, I'm working on the theory that most problems between China and the West stem largely from the fact that *they* want to do things *their* way while the West wants them to do things the Western way. Sure. It's a bit more complex than that, and while there are more bumps on the road ahead there is some indication that we have started to try to acquire some understanding of one another's point of view. One thing, however, will always remain a puzzle to me. That is, the Chinese breakfast. Where Americans start the day with hot rolls and jam, fruit juice and coffee, in China a bowl of bean curd milk or rice porridge is the star of their morning show. In most parts of the country, the supporting cast features such (cold) characters as steamed dough, tripe, pickled vegetables, jellied duck feet, boiled peanuts, salty duck eggs, blood pudding and perhaps a sliced, soy-sauced green vegetable.

I can eat just about anything which can be caught, cleaned and chewed. Pickled vegetables are one of my staples, and there is nothing nicer you can do

to a peanut than boil it, fresh out of the good earth. Blood pudding and jellied duck feet are OK. But somehow this all doesn't quite come together in harmony at sunup.

Westerners are on a more familiar footing with the Cantonese *dim sum yum cha* breakfast with dainty steamed dumplings with translucent wrappers, tangy little meat balls and yummy custards. From a practical standpoint, the pickles and peanuts breakfast is indeed more of an "eye opener" and Chinese friends insist they couldn't contemplate facing their immediate future without this Sino smorgasbord. The mere suggestion of buttermilk biscuits and gravy would be so unsettling they'd have to go back to bed until they got over it.

Having met myriad Chinese dawns in the company of friends over countless cold jellied duck feet, I've recently evolved a new regimen. I just say "no" to breakfast feasting with the group. Instead, in my room, I have cookies, tea and fruit (acquired earlier at the street market). That's plenty, as at sunup the standard non-Chinese digestive system will still be working on the previous night's banquet. Chinese don't grasp the Western inclination toward dieting, but it helps to tell them that avoiding a big breakfast keeps your weight under control while riding the Chinese banquet circuit.

The foregoing is less a critique of cuisine than it is an endorsement of the theory that aside from the peanuts and pickles at daybreak, just about everything else in our sometimes sputtering East-West melange is malleable. While China and the West are closer today in many ways than we give ourselves credit for, most foreigners have a muddled view of the Chinese simply because foreigners haven't taken a close enough look at them. Given a choice, it's far better to be a *befuddled* foreigner than one who has "been to China a couple of times" and come away convinced they have the Chinese figured out.

Initial incursions into Beijing (Peking), Shanghai, and Guangzhou (Canton)—the usual places foreigners go—do afford some opportunity to learn a little about China. (Certainly more than friends, neighbors and the home office staff may ever know.) But this smidgen should be kept in perspective. In the beginning, much

of what the foreigner "learns" or assumes is wrong. Or—at best—not altogether correct. But a start is a start.

Someone's having "been to Beijing and Shanghai" is not quite the same as having "been to *China*." Initial impressions, often acquired at the gallop, could be described as being the tip of the iceberg. They could be, but that's not quite how it is. In the case of China it would be more accurate to say, it is like a snowflake which is *about to fall* on the tip of the iceberg.

Simply asking questions about how the Chinese see things has its limitations. Throughout the Orient people tend to give an answer they think will please, or which they think may benefit them. The wrong question can only result in the wrong answer.

"When I want to return, I buy a ticket from the conductor when the train arrives?"

"Yes."

That's not the right question. It should be, "Is there any assurance there will be a seat available on the train when I want to return?"

Often, frustrations which foreigners endure result directly from our not saying what we mean. Weekending in Macau with my wife we found we had no water in the bathroom. Charlene is a good sport and a good traveler but having water in the bathroom is something she's picky about. I phoned downstairs.

"We have no water in the bathroom."

"Yes?"

Of course. Sloppy communication. It needed a replay.

"We would like to have some water in the bathroom."

Having said what I meant, the matter was quickly resolved.

Tuning in on the Chinese wavelength comes more easily if you follow the advice of the baseball great and sometimes philosopher, Yogi Berra, "You can observe a lot just by watching." Good advice. When you are not sure what you should do next—Watch and wait. Look and listen. It's an unbeatable combination that can get you out of a pickle faster than Dorothy's ruby red slippers got her out of Oz.

One day we stopped for lunch in a hot and remote region where we hadn't seen a foreigner for three days. This wasn't a fancy

restaurant but it was the best place in town. I was with old cronies who knew they could count on me to do something a little silly once in a while, if only to perform the primary function of foreigners in China; to provide comic relief. (This is recommended, if for no other reason than it helps them figure out that you aren't stuffy, which rates even lower than silly.)

In this context when the waiter approached with a bottle of questionable-vintage local brew, I extended my empty rice-bowl, and he filled it, to the group's amusement. Taking a sip, the stuff proved to be so bad it could only be swallowed with the most firm resolve. There was nothing on the table to pour it into. I was hungry and wouldn't get any food as long as whatever-it-was remained in the bowl.

Also, there were implications of "face"—my friends', the restaurant's and my own. The only option was to watch and wait. The person next to me wrung a giggle from the group by having his bowl filled too. He took a mouthful and his eyes rounded noticeably as his eyebrows fluttered. In a single motion he turned, sprayed whatever-it-was into the atmosphere, and emptied his bowl onto the floor. With the group's encouragement, mine followed his onto the floor—a demonstration of the wisdom of paying attention.

In wandering around the rice-eating Far East, I've found you can tell a lot about the wheat market potential of some new place without even bothering to ask. If the local bread looks bad, smells bad and tastes bad, it's obvious the people there don't like bread. And, the baker who baked it doesn't like bread either. That spells market *potential* for good bread. If you rely only on asking questions, in this case the answer would be, "We don't like bread." That's not it. They don't like *bad* bread.

With the Chinese, always pay attention to the little things. Little kids for example. Kids have a litmus quality which affords instant insights into the nature of a neighborhood.

Chatting with children made my first trip to the remote northwest frontier city of Urumuqi particularly memorable. Talking over my shoulder to youngsters who were trotting along beside me, I fell smack-dab into an open manhole. Happily, as foolish as one may appear in these circumstances, there is absolutely no social

stigma attached to a foreigner's falling into a manhole because it's not that uncommon. (The *China Daily* reported a few weeks later that 135 manhole covers had been stolen in Beijing in the first eight months of the year. Where they went, the authorities didn't say, but a manhole cover would make an ideal grill for a Mongolian barbecue.) After three stitches with black silk thread, administered by the head of the Xinjiang Medical Institute Hospital First Branch Outpatient Section, with his entire staff looking over his shoulder, I felt relatively reconstituted. Though I had some trouble convincing my overly-attentive hosts that, while their concern was appreciated, I absolutely did not want to be sear-sealed with the laser the hospital reportedly had tucked away somewhere.

Probably no one shows more concern for an injured visitor than the Chinese. No matter what assurance you give that a little blister or scratch "is really nothing," within minutes someone (whose departure you'd missed) suddenly reappears, with pockets and hands full of pills and time-honored potions to hasten your recovery.

In *Riding the Iron Rooster,* the engaging and mildly masochistic tale of train travel in China, Paul Theroux tells how he narrowly missed toppling into a deep hole in a factory in Langxiang. He was so rattled by the experience he "had to go outside and take deep breaths." As a learning experience, simply being rattled by what *nearly* happened can't compare to actually toppling into a hole in China. Foreigners should abide by the code of the ancients . . . walk or gawk, but don't walk *and* gawk. There are doorways, perhaps three floors up, opening out into space. Now and then there's an open elevator shaft. Uncovered manholes, unexpected and unrailed drops and broken curbs and sidewalks are common. Public liability coverage remains a foreign concept, not because Chinese are callous, but because they don't go around falling in holes.

On another character-building trip, my flight landed several provinces off course without enough gas in the tank to dampen a doily. We had to take a bus from the middle of the field where the plane rolled to a stop. During refueling, none of the passengers expressed any curiosity about the navigational error, because it was understood the answer would be designed to make everyone feel good, rather than to shed light on the situation. While the curiosity

of less-traveled foreigners might be piqued over such an incident, Chinese are inclined to discount it with, "What difference does it make?"

An authoritative view of how we've arrived at where we are today with China was shared in Hong Kong by Han Suyin, whose book *A Many-Splendored Thing* deals with the mingling of East and West in a romance set in Hong Kong. I asked her why it has taken so long for China and the West to come at least this close together.

"Has it really been all that long?" she teased.

"Not the way China looks at things, of course, but it *has* been several centuries."

"Perhaps," she replied, "it has something to do with the way the French fight wars. They always fight a war the way they fought the one before. With China, the West has perhaps had too many Sinologists who are more preoccupied with ancient dynasties than they are with the future."

Another point Westerners generally miss is that Chinese are more like us than we imagine. And, many of the dissimilarities are not all that different. Where we get "goose pimples" they get "chicken skin." If you sneeze, they say, "Longevity." They have heartburn and henpecked husbands. Their youngsters make mud pies, play hide-and-seek and jump rope. Where we cook birds and walk dogs, they walk birds—with cage in hand—and wok dogs. They make doughnuts that are long and straight and others the size and shape of a tennis ball, and hollow. Bridegrooms pay the wedding bills. At funerals they wear white, instead of black, and it's a tradition to give red eggs, instead of a cigar, to announce the birth of a son. Where we talk of a man in the moon, they speak of a lady, and a rabbit. Where we see the face of a fanciful monster in the variegated and animated blossom we call "snapdragon" they see gulping lips and call it "goldfish." They wave when they want someone to come nearer, while waggling your finger at someone in the Western come-hither style is, in many parts of China, a particularly obscene gesture. The major difference between Worcestershire and soy sauce would appear to be the fact that there are countless versions and brands of the latter. Where we bake bread they steam it. In earlier days they had drawbridges too, but theirs

were designed to sink, rather than to be raised. Chinese toddlers don't wear diapers. Instead, they are outfitted in trousers which are open at the bottom so their little undercarriages are unencumbered. When I suggested an apple a day keeps the doctor away, a friend in Beijing responded, "Hey. An *onion* a day keeps *everyone* away."

It was not Confucius who said, "Without our traditions we would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof." But he surely wouldn't have disputed the idea. Foreigners, who may know that Chinese are traditionalists, remain pretty much unaware of just how *intensely* traditional they can be in their day-to-day doings. An example of this can be seen on Hong Kong's beaches, which are elbow-to-navel during the hot and muggy summer season. With the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Chinese conclude that the seaside season has ended. However, the best beach weather comes after that, with dazzling and balmy sunny days, particularly in December. Aside from a few year-round exercise enthusiasts, Hong Kong's beaches in winter are pretty much left to the enjoyment of privacy-relishing, less-tradition-bound Westerners and Filipinos.

Coming to terms with contradictions has a lot to do with how the Chinese see the world. As a Ministry of Agriculture official expressed it, "A bad harvest is a problem, and so is a good harvest. How do you move it? How do you store it?" What is China's great blessing? Children. What is China's great problem? Population.

When you get two different answers, it doesn't necessarily mean one of them is wrong.

Despite their monumental consistencies, Chinese have the capacity to be wondrously inconsistent. Problems developed when a delegation we were taking to the US insisted we use their interpreter, rather than someone we wanted to take from our consulate. That was resolved by our taking their interpreter *and* our interpreter. Shortly after that the next delegation threw a curve by insisting *we* provide the interpreter. That complicated things as we hadn't budgeted for it. But we got the money and worked it out.

An essential element of working relationships in China is that if it is at all possible for you to do something they want, you should do it. If it is not possible, you are expected to find a way to make it possible. Flexibility is one of the best allies you've got and you

should always employ it with a smile. If something is indeed beyond the realm of possibility, you need only say it is "inconvenient" to put the matter to rest with no further explanation required. The word "inconvenient" conveys far more finality to the Chinese than "impossible."

Trying to figure out who the Chinese think they are is less a science than it is an art form. But, like a lot of art forms, if you're interested and make the effort, it will enhance your understanding, broaden your vistas, and for those involved with things Chinese, perhaps ensure a better night's sleep.

Willows planted at random spread a pleasant shade

Inscrutable? That's Disputable!

How to Read (the) Chinese

THROUGH SEVEN CENTURIES OF COMMERCE, contact and conflict since Marco Polo's odyssey to Cathay, the West acquired no substantial concept of how the Chinese think. And much—perhaps most—of what the West takes for granted about the Chinese is wrong.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic, one of the better backgrounded Americans to go to China was Fox Butterfield, the first *New York Times* correspondent in Beijing. He studied Chinese language and history at Harvard. After graduate work he studied in Taiwan on a Fulbright Fellowship. He began reporting for the *Times* in Taiwan in 1969, before going on to other Asian assignments. On his arrival in Beijing, with impeccable Asian orientation credentials, what was one of the first things he came to grips with? In his words, "I had to unlearn many of what I took to be facts about China."

One thing all foreigners seem collectively sure of is the idea Chinese are inscrutable. And they're wrong about that too. But the idea is so ingrained in our thinking that the phrase "inscrutable Chinese" has somehow managed to become both hackneyed and redundant with the adjective defying almost any other application.

Chinese don't find each other inscrutable. If *they* don't, why should we? If luncheon conversation with a friend in China begins to lag, an effective stimulant to getting it moving again is the question, "Did you know foreigners find Chinese ways strange?"

Typically, the response is, "*Really!?* But, foreigners are the strange and unpredictable ones!"

On a number of occasions Chinese acquaintances have confided (to our shared consternation) "You know, I don't think foreigners understand China." It's true, and the agony is compounded by the fact the Chinese don't understand foreigners either.

To act un-Chinese amounts to the unthinkable, "acting like a foreigner." A Hong Kong businessman, relating a problem he'd had with someone born in Shanghai, lamented, "That's not the way *we* do things. He's obviously part Russian."

Youngsters assimilate the spoken and signaled pressures of peers and parents and they get the message when things go unsaid or undone.

Two of the more subtle acquired arts are innuendo and indirection, which are applied masterfully in dealing with foreigners. These mask a basically direct and unswerving style.

To illustrate, here are some random observations:

- Chinese are easily offended. If a transgression, embarrassment or indignity is perceived to be of consequence, they are likely neither to completely forget nor forgive.
- If greatly displeased, they'll not miss an opportunity to even things up. They're never in a rush about this and when it happens it's done with the utmost finesse, like a triple-cushion pool shot.
- They are most unlikely to give any outward indication of genuine hurt or offense. A broken arm is kept inside the sleeve.
- If displeasure *is* shown, it's likely being done for effect.
- They are not particularly offended or surprised when foreigners breach the bounds of their view of civilized conduct, such as flailing cameras in the faces of "quaint and colorful" passersby. The reasons unruly outsiders were seen as barbarians hold true today. Foreigners who are sensitive and savvy enough to circumvent this ancient expectation please the Chinese and come across as a happy surprise.
- If you ask a question a second time about something you wish to pursue and they again say, "It is under study," or, "It is not a convenient time," you can conclude that the subject is closed, or very nearly so. If you can, drop the subject.

- If you raise your voice in anger, the louder and more upset you become, the less you are heard. They have the capacity to tune you out altogether in such circumstances.
- In hosting they will pamper you to pieces, having been working at banquet graces since the time when, outside China, people were sitting in trees sucking raw eggs and discovering that apples taste better than pine cones.
- A real Chinese friend will go to almost any lengths to help you, well beyond what you might expect from anyone else you've ever known.
- Appearing unexpectedly at the front door of Chinese friends, with your suitcases, you never will be asked how long you plan to stay. Each day they'll presume you'll still be there the next, and meals or entertainment will be planned accordingly. An early sage noted that your best chickens should be killed to serve guests, but it isn't polite to ask guests if they mind if you do so.
- In business, Chinese will strive to get the upper hand and expect you to do the same.
- A courtesy or kindness will be returned.
- In China, youngsters do not complain about what's on their plate.
- Chinese tend to subscribe to the philosophy, "Old ways are best," so a foreign manager in China can expect more problems than elsewhere in getting employees to adopt new procedures. If incentives are attractive or the employees have had a fair degree of exposure to foreign managers, introducing change is much easier. Face is part of the problem so any such efforts should be enhanced if you can get employees to understand the *reason* for a new procedure, while emphasizing that the way they were doing it before was not *wrong*.
- The Chinese who jostle you on a crowded Hong Kong street do not mean to be impolite. They simply feel they have as much right to that space as you have. Little old ladies jostle harder than anyone else, perhaps because at their age they feel they don't have as much time to put up with people getting in their way.

- If a mother is contending with a cantankerous toddler, and you smile and suggest, in Chinese, "I'll give you five bucks for the kid," her reply will be, "Just take him. No charge." Further, the youngster's deportment will immediately improve.
- You will get more done in China through personal relationships than you will through any institutional or contractual loyalty. It's unlikely this will ever change.
- If you meet a new business contact who seems rather dull, who says something along the lines of, "I'm just a simple person," be prepared for a memorable and perhaps costly lesson in Chinese business administration.
- Chinese are not by nature violent, and contrary to the widely-held foreign view, few are good enough at slam-bang Kung fu to hold their ground against a reasonably good boxer. However, Chinese do practice *Gung fu,* a variety of disciplines for toning both muscle and mind. "Gung fu" translates as "outstanding achievement," conveying the idea of exercise and is a generic term for all the so-called "martial arts." (Chinese friends assure me that the term "Kung fu" is strictly movie terminology.)

Gaining a better understanding of the Chinese is easier if you think of them as born actors. They are not as unemotional as foreigners presume. They fret, fear and fume the same as anyone else. Westerners expend a fair amount of energy in communicating feelings, but Chinese society doesn't work that way. Take my advice: never teach a Chinese to play poker. Westerners, who use facial expressions and gestures to augment communication can be unnerved by people who generally refrain from doing so at all. To compound our predicament, a smile or a chuckle from the Chinese, rather than indicating agreement or amusement, may signal nothing more than quizzical lack of comprehension. If some misfortune or accident occurs, Chinese laugh or grin out of embarrassment, which foreigners generally interpret as an inclination to mock adversity. Getting into an embarrassing situation is not what

Chinese are supposed to do. When it happens they laugh because they don't know how else to handle it.

Then we have those almost subliminal stirrings which we call "body language": such things as the shifting of one's bottom in a chair being a sign of boredom or annoyance. Chinese understand this international language and are highly skilled at affecting or suppressing these signals themselves. Their mastery in this affords them a comfortable edge.

Doing this even moderately well is not easy. Try sitting through a long, dull, frustrating encounter without the slightest glance, nod or furrowed brow and you'll better appreciate this skill. Being clearly outgunned, if you are involved in a particularly important negotiation you can make it a bit more difficult to read your expression at critical points if you take a chair with your back to a sunny window. (Providing they haven't already staked out those strategic seats.)

When Chinese choose—for effect—to use gestures, facial expression or tone of voice to make a point, to gain an upper hand or to put someone at ease, it is done with the smoothness of polished jade. Don't misread this as duplicity. These are no more than the basic skills employed by all diplomats, negotiators and parents of teen-age children. When we do this, we see it simply as technique. When they do it, it fuels our conviction of their inscrutability.

Reading the Chinese is like reading music or an electrocardiogram. You have to understand what the squiggles mean. To do well in fishing a trout stream, you have to understand what the water is telling you. Without some knowledge of water reading, you won't know where the biggest fish will be feeding. Golf requires some skill in reading grass. Catching more fish, playing better golf and understanding the Chinese requires you to learn to read the signs. What astonishes me is people who agonize over their nine iron will swing giddily into China without acquiring any knowledge of how people there think. And while we're at it, have you ever heard a golfer refer to an unruly nine iron as "inscrutable"?

It's well established that in foreign countries, students from traditional Chinese homes will be in the top of their class. Bringing

home a test paper with a score of ninety-five, they will be asked why the score wasn't 100. Where American parents praise a child, a Chinese parent is critical. But, in testimony to their adaptability, studies of families which have moved to the US show that by the third generation, students are more interested in "courtship and cars" than in school. Despite this ethnic back-sliding, important insights are provided by family values in traditional Chinese homes.

Traditional Chinese self-reliance and industriousness is legendary. Chinese-Americans' median income is the second highest after the Japanese. It's estimated that Chinese own more than ten percent of San Francisco. That just didn't happen by chance. Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore for more than thirty years noted, "The Chinese mother is a great force for education. She will nag about homework and keep the television off." Chinese parents endorse the Confucian respect for education. They make considerable sacrifice to provide the best possible schooling for their children. In our early days in Taiwan I was surprised to hear people of fairly modest means say they had youngsters in high-paying technical or professional jobs in the US, after the parents managed to put them through one of the better universities. Nearly half the doctoral candidates in American graduate schools for science or engineering are Asian. Sociologists have explored this willingness

of Asian parents to sacrifice more for a youngster's education than most American parents of similar means would do. The "cohesion" of the Asian family unit is cited as the underlying factor. But there's a filial *quid pro quo* which must be taken into account to understand the forces at work. The greater the parents' sacrifice for a youngster's education, the more comfortable are the parents' later years when the children traditionally provide for them. It isn't unusual for Chinese to save thirty percent of their income for investment, a child's education, or something else equally sensible. Frugality is a paramount virtue. Children are taught not to waste money on non-essentials.

The complete uniform of China's Young Pioneers, the equivalent of the Boy and Girl Scouts, is simply a red neckerchief worn with street clothes. Without a closet full of toys, youngsters entertain themselves for hours with nothing more than a puddle, a twig or a bug. Farmers pass an idle hour moving and capturing broken bits of straw and pebbles on a "playing board" scratched in the dust. Laborers fashion a Chinese chess game with bits of broken tile. Improvisation is clearly a Chinese characteristic.

Back to the inscrutability factor. You can learn a lot about this from Hong Kong tailors, who I've gotten to know pretty well since arriving in 1964 because I long ago gave up trying to buy a suit off the rack there long enough for my six-foot-two frame. The important thing to remember in having a suit made is: never haggle. It's OK to *ask* the price. When it involves something already made, haggle. But never when you're having something made. They can make a suit about as cheap and shoddy as you want.

Unless you've gone to the same tailor for years, his general approach—while charming—can be rather like that of an itinerant rug merchant trying to make the money for a train ticket out of town ahead of the police. They have every reason to believe they have you where they want you, because you'll probably be back in New Jersey before the zipper falls out, and the casual customer (particularly a tourist) doesn't often know a whole lot about tailoring or the quality of cloth.

The only disadvantage to using the same tailor is that it isn't as entertaining as going into a shop where they don't know you. One

day, at my wife's suggestion, I ventured into a new shop and ordered a suit. Returning to try it on, the tailor predictably oozed, "Perfect. That looks really great." When a tailor says that, study the merchandise carefully in the mirror. Tailors, remember, live by their wits, much the same as gypsies, itinerant roofers, riverboat gamblers and writers. Some tailors would say "perfect" if the suit hung on you like a sumo wrestler's mattress cover. Studying the warps and ripples, I gripped the jacket and pulled it forward leaving a foot-and-a-half cavity between it and my belt buckle.

"Fix this," I suggested.

"You prefer it *snug*?"

"I prefer it to fit." He agreed he'd take care of that.

"Other than that, it really is perfect," he purred.

"The sleeves are too short."

"Oh! Let me tell you. That is the difference between a tailor made suit and one you buy off the rack. With the ready made suit, the sleeve is always a bit long. The short sleeve is the *mark* of a tailor made suit."

This guy was good.

"I didn't know that about ready made suits," I said.

"Few people do."

"The reason I don't is because I haven't been able to buy a suit off the rack here for nearly thirty years," I replied, with a James Bondish icy stare.

He pondered a moment. "We'll fix the sleeves."

There is no crash course for getting acquainted with China or Chinese tailors. The learning experience rides China's timetable. The answer (or something close to it) eventually surfaces. For years a business associate, on his occasional trips to the Far East, pondered on the tasty little dried shrimp with which Chinese embellish a variety of dishes. "My, these are good," he would exclaim on discovering some in his soup. "I wonder how they make them?" Aside from being dried and salted no one could offer further details, although he never failed to exclaim and raise the question each time he came across them. They're often quite small, not much larger than a pea and, for lack of a better reference, he began referring to them as "pea" shrimp. Finally, holidaying one Sunday in Hong

Kong on Cheung Chau Island, we paused for a cool sip in the shade of a large flowering tree. Just across the lane, lay a newspaper on the ground scattered with shrimp, drying in the summer sun. "There you are. Pea shrimp being processed," I said, pointing to the little pink pile. "Yeah . . ." he said wistfully. "But there's got to be more to it than *that*."

As we relaxed over our drinks, a boy of perhaps four, toddled out of a nearby doorway. Marching straight to the newspaper, he paused, fumbled briefly with his britches, and suddenly launched a manly saline arc over the shrimp with a flourish which suggested he might be writing his name in Chinese. Wow. My associate looked as if a dead mouse had gone down his gullet with the last gulp.

Our conversation dwindled through the remainder of the afternoon until I came up with, "Things are not always what they seem in the Orient."

"If you're talking about the shrimp, I'm *sure* that's not how they do it," he grumbled.

"That's what I mean."

"I suppose you're going to use that in your dumb book."

"I won't use your name." He brightened considerably.

Few foreigners have a better grasp of the difference between reality and illusion in China than American James Veneris. Taken prisoner in Korea in 1950, he later joined twenty-two other prisoners of war in refusing repatriation and has been in China ever since. James is now a retired factory worker and teaches English at Shandong University. When I asked his views on Chinese "inscrutability," he laughed, "There's nothing mystical about the Chinese."

The world is different from what it was in those distant, dark days when James and I were swept up into the Korean War. As our global village shrinks in resources, clean water, breathable air and living space, it seems important that we try to become better neighbors.

A good neighbor is a treasure