

Bond

MICHAEL HARRIS BOND

BEYOND THE CHINESE FACE

*Insights from
Psychology*

BEYOND THE CHINESE FACE

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Preface

A people is a mirror in which
each traveller contemplates his own image.

André Maurois

IT IS my fifteenth year in Hong Kong and I still feel like a newcomer, a foreigner surrounded by an ocean of Chinese. Surprises abound in my daily world and even the old stand-bys retain their capacity to amaze, delight, irritate, and perplex. Some examples:

- A woman in her thirties enters the train, a baby strapped to her back, bags of shopping in one hand, a toddler of 3 or 4 clutching the other. The carriage is crowded and I offer her my seat. She thanks me, sits her toddler down, and remains standing.
- I am swimming lengths in our University pool. It is a Sunday and the water is crowded. Three students are racing widths, oblivious to anything but their own excitement. One of them ploughs into me full tilt, stops short, waves, smiles, and churns on. I look to the lifeguard for intervention. He is laughing.
- I stop our car at a toll booth to pay the fee. The attendant refuses my payment, pointing out that the driver of the preceding car has paid for me, and motions me through. The other driver waves as he speeds off and I recognize the dealer who sold us our car five years before.
- A candidate for a job opening in our Department is giving a seminar, so we can learn about his research (and his teaching skills) at first hand. He begins by apologizing for not being adequately prepared. 'It has been a very busy week and I have not had time to give my presentation proper attention. I do hope that you will overlook any shortcomings.'

Of course these events may give you no pause, but I am a 44-year-old, Canadian, male psychologist and they are some of my personal windows into Chinese society. As Edward Hall once put it, 'All cross-cultural exploration begins with the experience of being lost.' And the terrain in which you will find yourself lost will be determined by the terrain with which you are familiar. My youthful neighbourhood in Toronto did not prepare me for my travels in the back alleys and office corridors of Hong Kong, but learning my way around has been fascinating. In the midst of my personal frustrations, I have always tried to ask, 'Under what cultural rule can that puzzling behaviour possibly make sense?'

Such questioning has stimulated the design of many scientific experiments I regard as important. For example, cheerful collisions in the swimming pool have led me to wonder how Chinese might perceive someone they were compelled to compete against. The prediction based on Western theories is straightforward. The sentiment will match the relationship — friendly if co-operative, hostile if competitive. In fact, Chinese rate a future competitor as friendlier (not to mention warmer, kinder, and more capable), a reversal of the prediction based on the social logic that prevailed in the Toronto of my boyhood. As we shall discover, this reversal is eminently sensible in a culture where there are large inequalities of power, where the rule of law is perceived as ineffectual, and where a supportive interpersonal network is often one's only defence.

Indeed, the Chinese puzzle-box is full of many such surprises for us Western-trained social scientists. A sample might include the following:

- The children of immigrants have traditionally shown inferior academic results in their new schools. Recent Australian data, however, indicate that immigrant Chinese students dominate the top positions in their classes.
- The four 'little dragons' of South-east Asia — Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea — have averaged annual growth rates in Gross National Product of 9.5 per cent over the last twenty years. By contrast, the figure for the United States is 1.7 per cent, and for Austria, 3.5 per cent.

These examples bring home the challenge of the Chinese experience for non-academics as well. Caucasian Australian parents are worrying about how their children can compete for scarce places in professional colleges dominated by Chinese students; American housewives boycott Taiwanese textiles in an effort to protect their husbands' jobs. These concerns, like mine in the streets of Hong Kong, have led to much fruitful questioning. American educators have begun examining the reasons for the Taiwanese superiority in reading and mathematics; English business men are experimenting with Oriental approaches to labour relations and employee input. *Newsweek* entitled its cover of 22 February 1988, 'The Pacific Century?' Suddenly esoteric fascinations have become public currency.

In June 1986, Oxford University Press published a book I edited, entitled, *The Psychology of the Chinese People*. My intention at the time had been to consolidate the fragmented studies involving Chinese persons into a single academic reference that would provide a point

of departure for professional social scientists doing research in this area. My editor at Oxford University Press predicted total sales of 1,750, typical for such academic tomes. By June 1988 over 2,500 copies had already been printed. Sensing a sound bet, the Press proposed that I write 'a layman's version'.

I have enough respect for so-called laymen that I paused before accepting this suggestion. After all, laymen are decidedly indifferent to the obscure language we academics use in writing for one another. Could I write clearly enough, colourfully enough, topically enough, to hold such an audience? Of course, there was only one way to find out and taking risks has always been a part of my Toronto boyhood, so I said, 'Yes!'

I did not want this undertaking to yield merely a more palatable version of *The Psychology of the Chinese People* however. In a generally laudatory review of that earlier work, Arthur Kleinman had lamented the absence of 'chapters that attempt to integrate the very different contributions and reveal the golden thread tying each together'. In the late 1980s I certainly had more data at hand to help me weave this 'golden thread' and I certainly had more faith in my skill to do so. It is by striving to weave this golden thread that I could test whether I had made any academic progress in the intervening years.

This golden thread provides the basis by which the Chinese and Western traditions may be drawn together and compared psychologically. Its various strands become evident as scientists struggle to discover some means of understanding the contrasting types of behaviour of people from different cultural groups. Out of this intellectual struggle new theories and ideas sometimes emerge. These insights would not have been stimulated if the psychologist had been examining people only from his or her culture of origin; it has been teased out of the experience of being culturally lost. As a result of this confrontation with difference, however, a scientific basis for human unity across cultures has been woven. It was in this spirit that Abdu'l-Baha asserted long ago that 'the East and the West must unite to provide one another with what is lacking'. For surely the ultimate value in this scientific exploration across cultures is to discern how 'Within the four seas, all men are brothers'.

MICHAEL HARRIS BOND

Some thoughts on the future of the world

but a human race speaking many tongues, regarding many values, and holding different convictions about the meaning of life sooner or later will have to consult all that is human.

Gardner Murphy

Preface

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Some Warnings about Studying the Chinese Scientifically

The eye cannot see its own lashes.

Chinese adage

A COLLEAGUE at the Chinese University recently observed that there are 'hundreds of books like yours, purporting to explain the Chinese'. Being himself Chinese, he added, 'Of course, yours will be better!' Better or not, this book's distinctiveness must lie in its claim to scientific status. I am attempting more than traveller's notes, journalistic impressions, and insider's secrets, however judicious and experienced they may be. Instead, I am attempting to bring together the results of many observations that arise when scientists attempt to translate 'the words of sages' into methods of measuring 'things at hand'.

This short chapter has a philosophical focus and is meant to put the chapters which follow into context. Readers who are more interested in what psychologists know about the Chinese should proceed to the next chapter, giving these reflections a miss.

We Are Unique!

All groups value their identity and their creations — material, artistic, political, and so forth; indeed, they must do so to keep going — attracting new members, holding old members within their ranks, and generating the motivation to work towards group goals. As Henri Tajfel repeatedly demonstrated, group members derive some of their personal self-esteem from their membership in groups which they value.

A culture or nation is one such grouping. Such groups, especially when they feel under attack (even under scrutiny), are likely to close ranks and assert that they are special, different, or unique from other cultures or nations. This claim of distinctiveness nourishes a group and sustains the pride of its members. Groups avoid making cross-cultural comparisons and challenge any comparisons that are made. They will claim that the investigator did not adequately

understand the culture examined, that the measures distorted the real cultural phenomena, or that the interpretations of the results were biased.

The typical response is thus to dismiss the researcher's findings; the scientific response should be to improve the research. Which of these two responses happens depends on the researcher's personality characteristics and cultural background, and on the relationship between the cultural groups being compared. Social scientists are as much the human subject of their study as they are the studiers of their human objects. We can hardly expect their debates to be any less psychologically shaped than any other debate.

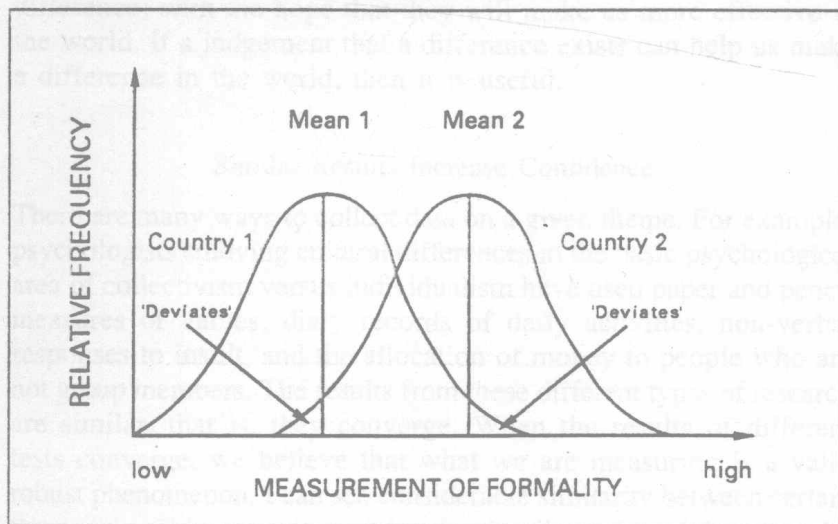
But we do. Science promises objectivity, rules of procedure, progress towards consolidated knowledge, and structure. Science can order the physical world, but often threatens our interpersonal world. For those who believe that the scientific journey is worth undertaking, all we can do is to offer up the rules of procedure for scrutiny and hope to reach an agreement. Ultimately each of us must decide what to accept. As St Thomas Aquinas put it, 'No man believes what he does not first believe to be believable.' These are the considerations which underlie the beliefs I present in this book.

Assumptions of this Book

The procedure of science requires the psychologist to choose a concept which interests him or her, such as interpersonal dominance, linguistic ability, or parental warmth, and then to devise ways to measure this concept reliably. The choice of a single aspect of a culture is selective and so cannot reflect the unique pattern of the whole culture. Any comparison made must be understood within the context of the culture and against the background of other comparisons, but such sympathetic 'packaging' of a comparison depends on the capacities of the psychologist involved.

Nor is there any guarantee that the comparison made will involve a concept which is of equal interest to both groups. American psychologists, for example, seem obsessed with attraction between people, fairness, and the concept of 'self'. Chinese psychologists appear more interested in modernization, leadership, and the early identification of learning ability (or disability). The amount of interest in a particular research topic does not make a comparison any less valid, as long as those involved in the research understand what they are doing.

Figure 1 The Distribution of 'Formality' in Two Countries



I hope that future cross-cultural comparisons will involve topics of greater interest to Chinese psychologists than those studied in the past. More trained psychologists and support from their educational institutions will help. So will moves to involve more Chinese in studying Chinese psychology, such as that currently led by Yang Kuo-shu in Taiwan. In the meantime, we will have to content ourselves with the comparative work currently available which has generally been initiated by non-Chinese psychologists.

Statements About Cultural Differences are Generalizations

Statements about cultural differences are based in the simplest case upon results of the sort that are presented graphically in Figure 1. We might conclude that this figure indicates that 'Members of Culture B show more formality than do members of Culture A.' A quick glance will show, however, that this is *not* true for some members of Cultures A and B whose scores fall beyond the average score of the other group. These deviates are more like members of the other group than those of their own. The blunt conclusions of any cross-cultural comparison are thus only more or less accurate.

How accurate depends on how much variation there is in the way people in the different cultures carry out the particular behaviour under study. For some types of behaviour the range of variability

is narrow; for others, large. As an example, David Buss recently ran a 37-culture study on preference in mate selection. There were strong cultural differences in the importance attached to chastity, but the importance attached to a good earning capacity showed fewer differences between cultures. Although there were cultural differences in the value attached to both chastity and good earning capacity, the relative variability within cultures for good earning capacity was very much smaller. So, not only can cross-cultural conclusions be challenged for particular cases, but some conclusions may be challenged more than others.

Chinese in Different Countries Are Similar

In the past most cross-cultural comparisons have involved only two cultures, one of which was usually American. Any Chinese sample will be different from an American sample, whether this Chinese sample comes from China, Singapore, or Chinatown in San Francisco. As a result psychologists have developed the questionable habit of talking about 'the Chinese' as if they were all the same and have tended to ignore the possible differences among the Chinese samples.

What is lost in this simplifying process is the answer to two intriguing questions:

1. Are the Chinese in various political, social, and economic settings similar? If so, how similar and for which sorts of behaviour?
2. To which other non-Chinese groups are the Chinese similar? If so, how similar and for which sorts of behaviour?

To answer these questions one needs multicultural, not bicultural, studies and one needs to examine many types of behaviour. Only now are such studies beginning to appear and the results are often surprising. For example, with respect to preferences in the choice of a marriage partner, the results for China are furthest away from those of Spain but closest to those of India; Taiwan is also furthest away from Spain, but closest to Bulgaria. Both China and Taiwan are different from the United States. With studies of other types of behaviour these patterns change and the Chinese groups show more similarity to each other (as with values), or less (as with rates of homicide).

At this stage of our knowledge, judgements about 'the Chinese' are obviously precarious. None the less, I will make them in this book. Some judgements I will make with confidence, especially those involving a contrast with 'Western' groups. Others will be

more arbitrary and tentative. We make judgements of similarity (or difference) with the hope that they will make us more effective in the world. If a judgement that a difference exists can help us make a difference in the world, then it is useful.

Similar Results Increase Confidence

There are many ways to collect data on a given theme. For example, psychologists studying cultural differences in the basic psychological area of collectivism versus individualism have used paper and pencil measures of values, diary records of daily activities, non-verbal responses to insult, and the allocation of money to people who are not group members. The results from these different types of research are similar, that is, they converge. When the results of different tests converge, we believe that what we are measuring is a valid robust phenomenon. I can see considerable similarity between certain themes in Chinese culture, like the fragility of social order, the importance of hierarchy, and the training for group cohesiveness. Such themes may, however, lie in the eye of the imaginative investigator. An organization of scientific facts is very much a creative act. I will draw my conclusions, but encourage you to draw your own.

Conclusion

We psychologists often believe we are engaged in a value-free enterprise called science and we may attach considerable authority and significance to the results we produce. I submit that we are engaged in a creative enterprise which has a set of public conventions that enable us to draw conclusions. Making sense of the outcomes from cross-cultural psychology is a risky undertaking, given the sketchy data base and the potential for offending some cultural groups. None the less, I choose to go ahead.

A journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step.

Tzu-ssu

Socializing the Chinese Child

A thousand days at home, peace;

A moment abroad, trouble.

Chinese adage

THE CHINESE child is brought up to regard home as a refuge against the indifference, the rigours, and the arbitrariness of life outside. This feat is achieved by indulging the infant, restraining the toddler, disciplining the schoolchild, encouraging the student to value achievement, and suppressing the divisive impulses of aggression and sexuality throughout development. Constantly during this process one is taught to put other family members before oneself, to share their pride and their shame, their sadness and their joy. Family relationships become a lifelong affair, with family activities continuing to absorb the lion's share of one's time and responsibility.

Even after one has married, the obligations continue. Article 15 of China's family law asserts that: 'Children have the duty to support and assist their parents. When children fail to perform the duty of supporting their parents, their parents have the right to demand that their children pay for their support'. This cardinal relationship extends past death, with the tradition of maintaining family shrines to the departed and two major grave-tending holidays every year. Such relationships of mutual succour are not confined to parents and children. Aunts, uncles, elder brothers, and elder sisters are expected to contribute their finances, their dwelling space, their good offices to their junior charges whenever the need arises. Inside the womb of the family, 'you and I are one', as a Chinese proverb puts it.

The foregoing summary is, of course, an ideal. In Chinese culture there is neglect and abuse of children, divorce, alienation of sons from fathers, dereliction of duty by gambling parents, abandonment of grandparents, and so forth. These failures of the family are especially acute in Chinese society, however, precisely because there are fewer personal and institutional supports outside the cradle of the family. Many Chinese learn early to 'swallow anger' and to tolerate the intolerable because they do not see how they can live

outside their family of origin or marriage. Chinese culture is no place to be alone.

How does this transformation of human infants take place?

The Life Cycle

Genetic Predispositions

Psychologists previously regarded a child's environment as crucial in shaping his or her development. But over the last thirty years they have explored hereditary influences. By comparing identical twins with fraternal twins, it has become evident that there are genetic bases which set limits on how much a person can be shaped. Genetic influences affect intelligence, activity level, sociability, emotionality, and even aspects of morality.

Racial differences of a genetic nature may be based on heredity, especially where members of racial groups have tended to marry within their own group. Philippe Rushton has made some very arresting claims that Negroids, Caucasians, and Mongoloids (which include the Chinese) are arranged in this same order with respect to many characteristics ranging from level of intelligence to speed of development, from anxiety proneness to marital stability. Controversy surrounds some of these claims about differences and many of the genetic arguments. There is strong evidence, however, about temperamental differences in Chinese babies.

David Freedman compared Caucasian American newborns with Chinese American newborns, and found temperamental differences between them. The Caucasian babies were more irritable, more changeable in their level of contentment, more easily upset, and less consolable than the Chinese babies. These differences, with the addition of a higher level of activity among the Caucasian babies, continued during the children's first five months. Given the presence of these differences from birth, Freedman favoured a genetic explanation for them. As we shall discover, Chinese passivity and calmness dovetail smoothly into family demands for restraint and emotional control.

Universal Variations in Parental Behaviour

Warmth and control are two fundamental characteristics of parental behaviour towards children that can vary considerably. From work in a number of cultures Earl Schaeffer has developed a two-factor

map which can be used to describe the differences in how parents (or caretakers in general) raise their charges.

Ron Rohner has extensively examined the warmth dimension in a number of countries. He, like many others, is concerned with the contrast between acceptance, care, and concern for the child and its polar opposites of neglect, abuse, indifference, harshness, and rejection. These fundamental attitudes are communicated in a host of daily exchanges with the child. Their effects on the child's personality are profound and wide ranging. Children who are cherished by their caretakers develop an optimistic, generous, and responsive approach to life and to other people; those who are rejected become depressed, suspicious, withdrawn, and emotionally volatile. To borrow from Erik Erikson, parental acceptance or rejection, especially in the early stages of infancy, shapes the child's basic orientation of trust versus mistrust towards the world. This orientation will direct and colour the child's whole life.

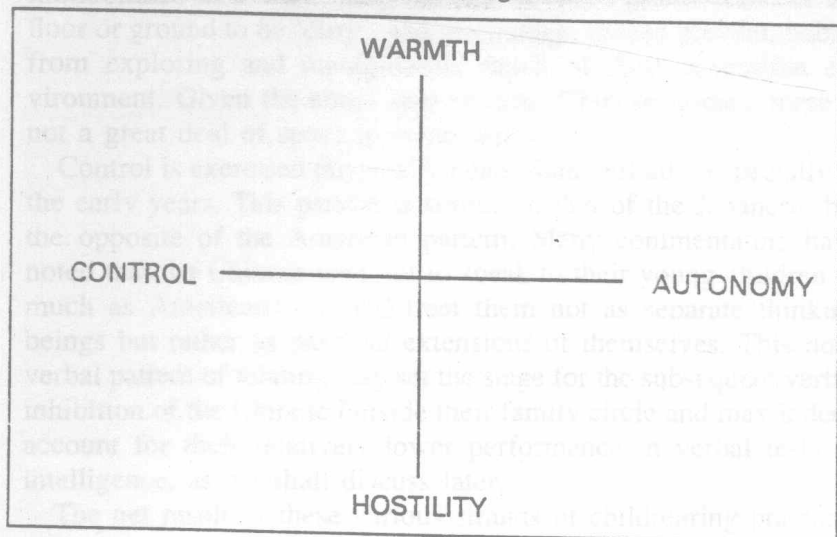
The second dimension of parenting concerns control, as opposed to autonomy. At the restrictive end of the continuum are parents who supervise their children closely, limiting their activities, speech, and friendships to what is acceptable to the parents. At the other extreme are parents who allow their children to associate, explore, and come and go mostly as they please. This contrast is found both within and between different cultural groups. Indeed, as Lucian Pye has persuasively argued, these differing styles of parenting may be mirrored in the country's political organizations.

Using these two key aspects of parenting, one can construct a two-dimensional grid on which it is possible to locate the typical pattern of parental behaviour in any given culture (see Figure 2). Compared with other cultures, the Chinese appear to be moderately warm and very restrictive in their parenting. How caretakers show acceptance and control will of course vary during the life cycle, and it is to the stages of childhood that we now turn.

Infancy and Early Childhood

There is surprisingly little comparative information on early patterns of caretaking. This is a lamentable state of affairs when one considers that we are talking about the formative age of almost 30 per cent of the world's population. The existing information, combined with lore, observation, and speculation, however, yields a fascinating account.

Figure 2 Universal Dimensions of Parenting Behaviour



Early Care

David Ho's work on traditional patterns of childrearing indicates that, before the age of reason (about 5 years), the infant is not regarded as a separate individual requiring adult input beyond the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. The infant is a great source of delight and joy for all in the family, however, and is almost always surrounded by familiar people. So the infant will often sleep with his or her parents, travel strapped to mother's (or grandmother's) back, and be a part of family gatherings at all times of the day or night. The pattern of close, intense relationships with a narrow circle of other people thus begins early. It is this early indulgence, especially with food, that so interests psychoanalysts. As Warner Meunsterberger, for example, asserts:

Few children are fed and treated with so much permissiveness. As far as we can ascertain, oral deprivation does not occur during this early period. Experience with hunger is avoided by feeding the child upon hearing him cry.

This pampering at the oral stage of a child's development establishes a lifelong preoccupation which lays the foundation for what psychoanalysts have labelled 'oral-receptive mastery'. They use this basic orientation to explain a host of other behaviour, including the Chinese obsession with food, the institutionalization of a rest