



8 September 2011

China Business: Who Is More Chinese...?

To absorb a key principle of doing business in China, read through the six bios below, keeping in mind the question "Who is more Chinese?"

Gary Locke. The current US Ambassador to China. Previously served as the US Secretary of Commerce in the Obama administration. Locke is a third generation American of Chinese descent. He has not previously lived in China; does not speak Mandarin; does speak a variant of Cantonese.

Jon Huntsman. Previous US Ambassador to China. Now seeking nomination as the Republican party's US Presidential candidate. Huntsman lived in China for 20 months as ambassador and in Taiwan for two years as a Mormon missionary. He speaks Mandarin and has an adopted daughter from China.

Takeshi Kaneshiro. Actor and musician known for playing Chinese heroes in Chinese historical epics [Red Cliff](#), [House of Flying Daggers](#), and The Warlords. Kaneshiro is a Japanese citizen, born and raised in Taiwan: father is Japanese, mother is Taiwanese. He speaks Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese, Cantonese, and English.

Pearl S. Buck. American author and missionary of European descent. Received the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for [The Good Earth](#), Buck spent most of the first 45 years of her life in China and learned Mandarin before learning English. She is acclaimed for "[demythologizing China and the Chinese people in the American mind](#)". Her books increased sympathy and support for China, in opposition to Japan, during World War.

Da Shan. Canadian-born television performer and Chinese media celebrity of European descent—also known as Mark Rowswell. Arguably the best-recognized "foreigner" in China, Rowswell promotes numerous products, services, and causes locally. He is recognized by hundreds of millions of Chinese viewers for hosting Chinese New Year specials and other CCTV programming.

Amy Chua. Lawyer and author known for touting the benefits of "traditional" Chinese parenting style in [Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother](#). Chua was born and educated in the US. Her parents are Filipinos of Chinese descent. Chua has never lived in China, and reportedly does not speak Mandarin or other Chinese dialects.



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The answer to "Who is more Chinese", common to many questions about modern China is:
"It depends!" The related business principle is that **EVERYTHING IS SITUATIONAL**.

- If being Chinese is based on ethnicity and family legacy Gary Locke and Amy Chua are ahead; Takeshi Kaneshiro gets half credit on his mother's side. Huntsman has a Chinese daughter.
- If Chinese-ness is based on Chinese language capability, Chua loses; Kaneshiro is ahead based on number of Chinese dialects. Gary Locke loses ground by knowing only the "Taishan" dialect; the others know Mandarin.
- If living in China is a quality of being Chinese, Pearl S. Buck and Da Shan are on top, followed by Huntsman.
- If producing monetary gain and positive cultural exposure for China is the criteria, Da Shan, Buck and Kaneshiro are more "Chinese"; Locke may end up being seen as "the least Chinese" depending on US-China foreign policy and trade relations.

Because most issues and answers are situational, the best strategy is to understand why a question is being asked in the first place. In China, decisions and actions are very utilitarian, with practicality being the guiding principle. Knowing the context is critical to coming up with the best/most workable answer.

Doing business in China requires asking and answering a lot of questions. Answering a question with a question can be effective. Without knowing why a question is being asked, or what the context is, resist giving an absolute response that may haunt you in the future. Just smile, remember the question about "Chinese-ness" and say "it depends".

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