

With all the hubbub about China as the next economic superpower and its huge influence on globalization and outsourcing, cultural guides aiming to prepare the business traveler for an encounter with the 'Red Giant' are a dime a dozen. The problem is that most of them will tell you how you're expected to behave but fail to let you know why that is so. That makes it difficult for you to master non-standard situations and leaves you guessing 'why these people are so strange'.

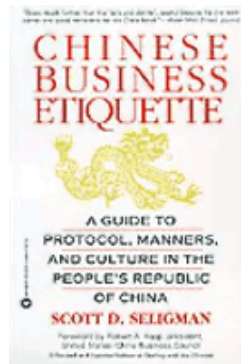
This book is different. In every single chapter of *Chinese Business Etiquette*, author Scott Seligman, a business and public relations specialist who has lived in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan for several years, does a remarkable job explaining the underlying reasons for protocols and manners being what they are. He does so without getting carried away with dry discussions of China's history, making the book light and entertaining reading. Key learning points are summarized at the end of each of the thirteen chapters, which cover a wide range of common business situations from getting in touch and greeting people to attending banquets, gift-giving, and hosting the Chinese.

Seligman even manages to keep some rather theoretical passages, like the chapter about

basic cultural differences, interesting by discussing practical implications and including many examples. Noteworthy are the chapters on *Guanxi* (connections) and especially the one on *Mianzi* (face) which covers many facets of this all-important concept, from individual and organizational face and the concept's implications for foreigners to methods for giving and gaining face, such as using titles, praising others, displaying wealth, and so on.

While comprehensive on etiquette and manners, Seligman's book isn't a complete guide to Chinese business culture. For example, it lists several useful ideas for "Getting to Yes" but fails to explain the elaborate and often complicated process Chinese negotiations follow. Similarly, how decisions are being made in China, where groups rather than individuals may be the primary decision makers, gets only mentioned in passing. You may want to do some additional reading on this subject, as it will be pivotal in extensive business negotiations to understand ways for you to influence the outcome.

In spite of those shortcomings, this is a well-written book that I highly recommend to anyone interacting with the Chinese in business. Given the rapid pace of change in China today, the fact that this book was published in 1999 makes it slightly outdated, for instance in some of the comments about the telecommunication system. Since almost all of the cultural advice still applies, though, that does not make it any less valuable.



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A seasoned former executive of a Fortune 500 company, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world. These included many parts of Asia, e.g., China, India, and Japan. Originally from Germany, he has lived and worked both in the United States and in Europe.

