

Book Review

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Hyacinth Gaudart,

Understanding Asia: Forms of Address in Asia (August Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 2010). 172pp. ISBN 9833317685

In the introduction to 'Understanding Asia- Forms of Address in Asia' the author invokes the indignity of 'having names readjusted, hyphenated, truncated or simply changed.' This experience is common and was until the recent research of Zheng and MacDonald (2009) an interaction in need of much clarification. The use and misuse of Asian names can occur even in English language classrooms where one would hope for greater cultural sensitivity. Often business negotiations are impacted by perceptions of respect being challenged through misuse of titles or differing approaches to public and private knowledge in the introductory phase of an interaction. The effective use of initial meeting strategies as transnational business develops has been reported as being especially challenging (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Relationship building is essential in all communication, including high stake business meetings and classroom interaction where the use of appropriate titles and names is an important contributor to building empathy and acceptance. In many contexts there is a need for a practical approach. However, the use and misuse of names is often popularly addressed in self help texts invoking simplistic Asian versus European generalizations which pay little heed to the complex linguistic and national mix of East, South East, South and Western

Asia. Gaudart's medium sized book differs by being ambitious in concisely describing twenty five countries, yet it succeeds by closely defining the areas of coverage as the use of names in the introductory phases of interaction in the English language. In all intercultural communication the correct use of names play an important role whether in mother tongue or an additional language. This guide addresses this shared experience for users of English as an international language working across cultures.

The concise, yet broad ranging, book draws on the shared experiences of many, including the author whose background is that of a Malaysian English language teaching specialist of Portuguese, Malay, Chinese, Indian, West African, French, Thai and English ancestry. A country by country approach is used with profiles ranging geographically from Mongolia to Indonesia and Philippines to Iran. For each of the twenty five countries a brief factual country profile on population with geographical details begins the section. This is followed by a page or so of concise country backgrounds which are accurate as of the publication date of 2010 and peppered with short interesting cultural tidbits. These are clearly for those new to the particular country, as is the introduction which uses well chosen anecdotes to illustrate areas of potential embarrassment or misunderstanding. The section on China, for example, uses the well known area of ordering family and individual names in a way totally different from Northern Europe; where first and last name ordering differences can cause identification problems. The core section on forms of addresses focuses on business and everyday meetings where English is being used for international communication. It is in the well researched descriptions of the use of names that one perceives a concise balanced approach to raising awareness, rather than an attempt to cover all the hierarchical complexities which one finds in such languages as Korean, Vietnamese and Thai, to name but a few. The areas addressed include varied levels of formality and the use of honorifics, which if not used correctly in some negotiations can be seen as disrespectful of a potential international business partner or a learner. For some cultures, titles are extremely important and one finds useful detail on combinations which may seem to mix the formal and the informal in settings

such as Malaysia, where this writer is often called 'Dr Stephen.' Examples of how rapidly one can move from public to personal domains of information sharing are practically described for each of the twenty five countries covered.

The complexity and necessity of the usage of correct names is evident in each of the country descriptions. The author recognizes that a guide of this size cannot consider all the regional differences and cultural values embedded within the national languages and related dialects in nations as diverse as India, Indonesia, Singapore or China. As such, the handy sized book achieves its aim as a guide to 'through the maze of Asian forms of address when people are interacting in English.' Such initiatives increasingly include English language teachers as transnational education with the cross crediting of courses, including English for Specific Purposes courses become a norm. Many of our regions often overly favored so-called 'native speakers' (Hall, 2007) would find information here which could raise culture awareness of the importance of names in affirming an English language learner's identity as a multilingual speaker. As most names from our first language are carefully chosen by our parents or caregivers to reflect a view of who the child is in the mother tongue cultural context, then attention to name use would seem to be an important part of international cultural sensitivity. As Gaudart states in her handy guide to using names 'there is no real Asian way'(2010,v), yet one finds useful signposts to the complexity of interacting in English when meeting others in Asian countries.

THE REVIEWER

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A Review of 'Understanding Asia - Forms of Address in Asia' by Hyacinth Gaudart

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