



# Overseas Chinese influence on trade

Authors give insight into how book was written

## New Asian Emperors

**Authors:** George T. Haley, Usha C.V. Haley and Tan Chin Tiong

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**T**HOUSANDS of business delegations enter China every year. Most of these delegations comprise Overseas Chinese who live in other parts of Asia, and the West, who now sees an opportunity for trade and business in Mainland China.

Although they may not know the language and business culture there, the Overseas Chinese are somehow drawn to the familiar, or what they perceive to be familiar. In all likelihood, much of their aspiration may be due to a pining for their roots.

Be it a search for one's history or clan, the authors of *New Asian Emperors* delve into the subjects of roots, shoots and harvests that may arise as a result of the differing business strategies of the Overseas Chinese.

George T. Haley, professor of marketing at University of New Haven, wrote this book together with his wife Usha and Tan Chin Tiong, deputy president of Singapore Management University, through interviews with major Overseas Chinese business executives. Usha is an Asia Programs Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University. They reside in the United States while Tan is in Singapore.

They got to know each other when the Haleys were working at the National University of Singapore from 1994-96.

In this email interview, the three of them talk about the whys and wherefores, and give readers a glimpse of their friendship which made this book possible.

**Q: There are so many books on the Chinese diaspora out there. What prompted the three of you to write *New Asian Emperors*?**

**George:** Most books focus on the dominance of the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia's various economies. They treat the Overseas Chinese as either benevolent superhuman geniuses or an evil conspiracy.

Although we depend largely on interviews with major Overseas Chinese business executives, we don't focus on the executives, but on how and why they make the decisions they do.

We acknowledge the competitive advantages, and weaknesses introduced by that decision-making style. We also discuss the Western decision-making style that is commonly presented as the ideal. We believe management decision-making must evolve into a global decision-making style that Overseas Chinese, Chinese and Western management will have to adopt if they wish to remain competitive.

**What are the aspirations of the three of you?**

**G:** We aspire to create understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both management styles. Both Usha and I have had the opportunity to shape US government policies through our research. Too often in the West, there is a presumption that it is the only correct way to conduct business.

As the present economic crisis shows, the Western decision-making style is equally capable of creating economic disaster as Chinese and Asian decision-making styles are.

We are not saying that if both Western and Overseas Chinese/Mainland Chinese decision-making styles converge, there will be no future economic crises. However, with the convergence, there will be greater understanding and better overall management of both Western and Overseas Chinese/Chinese companies.

**What are your different interests and in which area did the three of you converge?**

**G:** We have a tremendous interest on business in Asia and other emerging markets and business cultures – India and Latin America and we do work in both areas. On a personal basis, I have a long-term and continuing interest in Asian history and philosophy, and in psychology, in which I earned my first college degree.

My interest comes from my father, who spent World War II in Asia, and from my great uncle Nicholas.

My mother's family was from the Philippines and controlled the largest trading fleet based there in the late 1800s. He was my



family's factor in China and spent eight months of every year travelling between Shanghai and Hong Kong. They and Overseas Chinese retirees who used to care for me periodically as a child filled me with countless stories on Asia and the Chinese.

I drew on my deep interest in Chinese philosophy and history to anchor *New Asian Emperors*. Their strengths and weakness originate from their history and culture. On Usha's side, her father served on the boards of three Hong Kong-based subsidiaries of major Indian companies, so she inherits her interest in China and Southeast Asia.

**Tan Chin Tiong**, the third author writes:

My grandfather came from China and started businesses in different parts of South East Asia. My father operated the Singapore business for decades. My interest in family business started as a kid, and continues as a professor in the business school.

**Whose idea was it (to write the book) and what sparked off this interest?**

G: The initial work was done by Chin Tiong and me in research conducted for a journal article, *The Black Hole of Southeast Asia: Strategic Decision-Making in an Informational Void*, published in 1996.

Later, Usha and I wrote another journal article, *Boxing with Shadows: Competing Effectively with the Overseas Chinese and Overseas Indians of Southeast Asia*, which compared the business cultures and ethics of the Chinese, Japanese and Indians. These two research articles, and

several others we wrote, provided the academic bases for our book.

**You briefly wrote about the Chinese in Malaysia. What role does the Chinese play in the Malaysian economy and how does this compare with the Chinese in Singapore and Hong Kong?**

G: Depending on your source Malaysians of Chinese origin make up between 21% and 26% of the Malaysian population, yet they generate an estimated 42% of the Malaysian economy. Comparing Malaysia to Singapore and Hong Kong is dangerous. There is a big difference between a city state, a city and a nation state.

Singapore is a true city state; its population is barely more than 61% the population of metro Kuala Lumpur and about 17% the population of Malaysia. Hong Kong, though now part of China, spent much of its recent history as a city state. Both are majority Chinese societies. Singaporeans of Chinese origin make up about 76.8% of the population and generate about 81% of the Singaporean economy.

**What did you discover while writing this book? It could be discoveries about your personal self, the friendship the three of you share, or some new revelation about the subject of your writing.**

G: I don't know if we found out things so much as had things confirmed. One thing for sure, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Chinese management practices evolved from a hostile environment which led to secrecy and personal trust being primary elements of Chinese management. That has remained until today.

**There's been much interest in India's businesses today. What are your views on the global growth of India's and China's businesses today and the interest they are generating among Western writers?**

G: These are important markets that are shaping how the rest of the world works and plays. However, we were surprised to find out that very few foreign companies actually made significant profits in either country! Currently, Usha and I are working on a major research project on differences and similarities between management in India and China. Usha is also

writing a book on how business with and in China has had global trade ramifications. Chin Tiong has had wide experience in these countries as well.

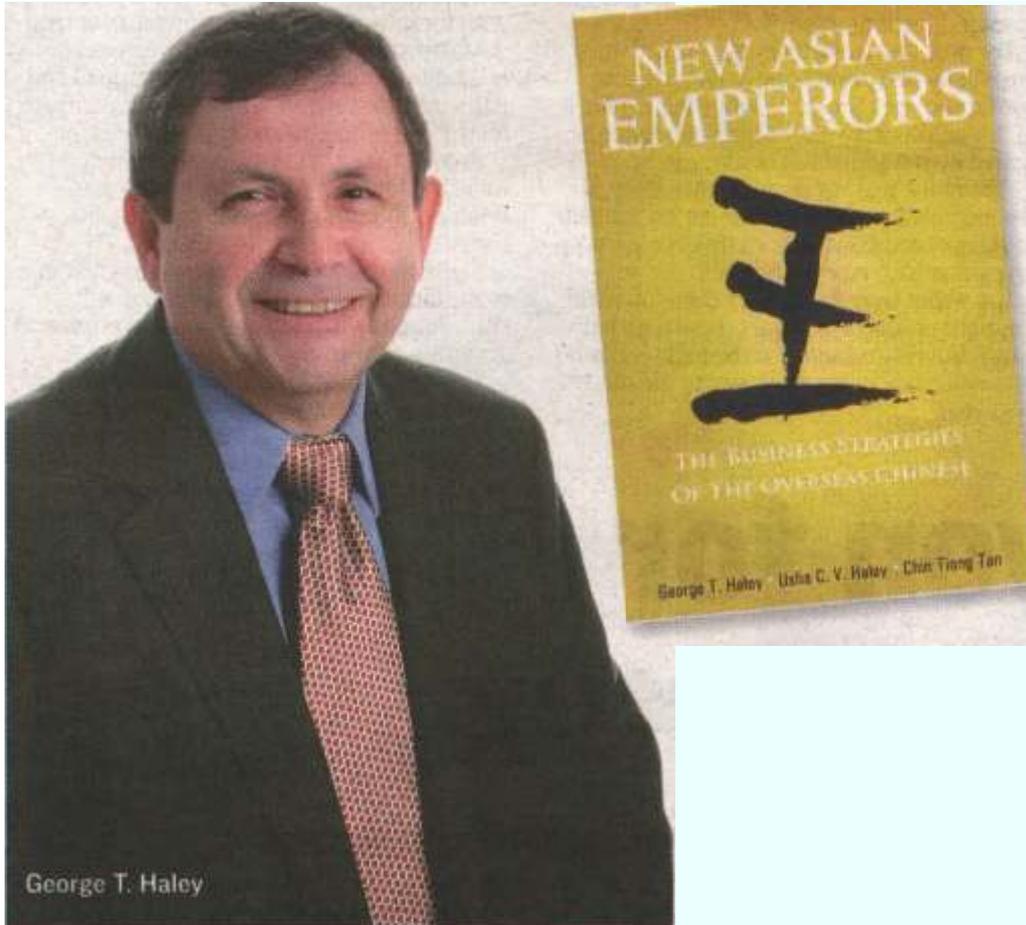
**Tell us a little about the personal lives of the three of you? How many hours do each of you read and write on the average in a week or day? What are your hobbies and what excite all three of you?**

G: Generally, I read and work on research three to four hours a day when I am not teaching or travelling. Reading is one of my hobbies. I also keep up with my home town basketball team, the San Antonio Spurs, and my favorite football teams, the professional Houston Texans and the University of Texas at Austin.

I love archeology and history. Usha and I have taken up golf. Whenever possible, we also like to take in a Broadway musical in New York.

**Usha:** We read widely – everything from the *New York Times* and the *Financial Times* to local newspapers and magazines in Asia. I love cooking. Malaysian food is one of our favourites – and yes, eating as well. You could call us foodies. We also collect antiques and have a nice collection of old Persian rugs. Other than that – we research, write books and academic articles, teach, give many talks and seminars around the world.

**Tan:** I read a lot. My daily reading includes five to six different newspapers. Weekly reading includes six to 10 magazines. My hobbies include travel and fine dining.



George T. Haley



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