

BBC Learning English – Ask About Britain

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Mysterious Chinese? 神秘的中国人?

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*A: For hundreds of years the Chinese had this reputation of being inscrutable.
B: I do think that generally speaking there is a tradition in Britain of people thinking the Chinese are a little mysterious.
C: The Chinese are very disciplined, very hard-working, very productive, which is why British people think they are mysterious.*

Finn: Hello and welcome to Ask About Britain. Today's question is about what British people think about Chinese people. I'm Finn.

Yang Li: 大家好，我是杨莉。今天的英国问答节目我们将回答 Jessica 通过电子邮件提出的问题:由我们的同事 Feifei 代读:

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What do the British people think about Chinese people? Do they think we are mysterious?

Yang Li: 英国人对中国人怎么看，是不是觉得中国人具有神秘感?

Finn: Well, the first English person we talked to is Barry who works as a cultural consultant in London:

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For hundreds of years the Chinese had this reputation of being inscrutable, which means they are mysterious, which means no one knows what they are thinking.

Finn: According to Barry the Chinese have a reputation for being inscrutable, another way of saying mysterious:

Yang Li: 难以理解的 inscrutable; 神秘的 mysterious.

Finn: But why do they have this reputation?

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The answer is, I think, to do with two things – facial expression and body language. It's quite well-known now, that Chinese people don't normally smile unless there's something to smile about; whereas Westerners smile even if they don't have something to smile about, because they want to show friendliness. The second thing,

I think, is that the Chinese also don't use strong body language unless they are angry.

Yang Li: Barry 觉得这种所谓神秘感的背后主要有两个原因:

Finn: Facial expression and body language.

Yang Li: 面部表情和肢体语言。

Finn: He said that Chinese people don't normally smile and they don't use strong body language unless they are angry.

Yang Li: 首先中国人不面带笑容。其次, 除非在生气的时候, 中国人很少使用夸张的肢体语言 strong body language.

Finn: Well, Li to be honest, I'm not sure I entirely agree with him, because I can see that you are smiling right now.

Yang Li: That's because I am presenting this programme with you.

Finn: But of course. Next we talked to two students from the London School of Economics:

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A: In general I think Chinese are very disciplined, very hard-working, very productive, which is why British people think they are mysterious because they work long hours and study very, very hard.

B: They are very, very hard-working, very goal-orientated, they're just really very focused and I think that's a massive difference between the Chinese and maybe more European side of the world I'd say.

Finn: They suggested that British people's impression of Chinese as being mysterious may have something to do with the following characteristics: firstly, being hard-working.

Yang Li: 勤奋的。

Finn: And focused.

Yang Li: 专注的。

Finn: And goal-orientated.

Yang Li: 有追求的。

Finn: As well as disciplined.

Yang Li: 能够自律的。这两个女学生认为上述这些与西方人不同的特点, 往往给人造成了中国人具有神秘感的印象。

Finn: The final clip is from our colleague William who shared an amusing story with us:

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And I was very amused to learn very recently that about 150 years ago, when British sailors were trading with Chinese merchants, a lot of them thought that the Chinese language was basically something the Chinese had made up in order to confuse them – and I think that's partly because British people just couldn't possibly conceive of a language as difficult as Chinese.

Yang Li: 太有意思了，他说 150 年前英国海员同中国商人进行贸易交往时，认为汉语是中国人编造出来故意迷惑老外的。我们来学几个单词：海员；水手。

Finn: Sailors.

Yang Li: 中国商人。

Finn: Chinese merchants.

Yang Li: 编造出来使人迷惑。

Finn: Made up to confuse people. But as William said that's partly because British people just couldn't conceive of a language as difficult as Chinese.

Yang Li: Couldn't conceive of a language as difficult as Chinese. 英国人无法想象出能有像汉语一样的如此复杂的语言。

Finn: I am not surprised that people should feel that way about Chinese.

Yang Li: But you are the exception, aren't you, Finn?

Finn: 你说我是个例外吗？非常感谢了。Well, let's hope we have given our listeners some insights into how Chinese people are perceived by British people.

Yang Li: 如果大家有更多的问题欢迎发邮件给我们，邮箱地址是 chinaelt@bbc.co.uk.

Finn: Thanks for listening and see you next time.

Yang Li: Bye.

Glossary

mysterious 神秘的	facial expression 表情
inscrutable 不可理解的	body language 肢体语言
goal-orientated 有追求的	sailor 海员；水手
focused 专注的	merchant 商人
self-disciplined 能自律的	conceive of 想象