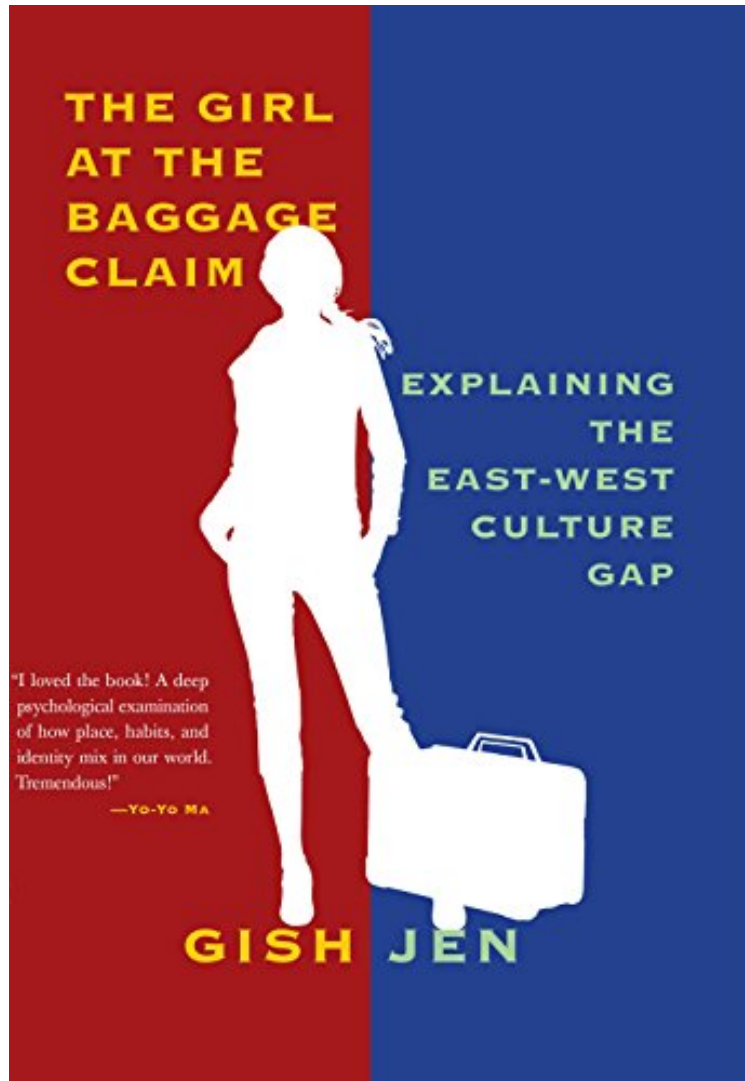


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# The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap

Gish Jen

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**Gish Jen : The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Girl at the Baggage Claim: Explaining the East-West Culture Gap:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. rdquo; Who better to write about the East West culture gapBy R. AlfaroGish Jen describes herself as ldquo;a person from an interdependent backgroundrdquo; who ldquo;developed a full-blown individualistic side.rdquo; Who better to write about the East West culture gap? Jen is an acclaimed novelist, an Asian American who has taught in both America and China, and The Girl At the Baggage Claim comes

alive because of her insightful, wide-ranging curiosity and her engaging style. Jen finds that Asians focus more "on the context than the object in it... the general than the exceptional... the group than the individual... the ordinary than the extraordinary... the non-self than self." Her arguments range far and wide: from the differences between Apple and Alibaba and between Lucien Freud with his warts-and-all portraits and Fan Kuan with his tiny human figures lost in his majestic landscapes. She praises the "ambivalent" attitude of the New England Patriots, individuals in the locker room who pull together as one when they're on the field. The chapter I enjoyed most in Jen's book was the last in which she speculates about what ultimately happened to the girl at the baggage claim, who got into a prep school on the results of her sister's test scores. The chapter is sharp, evocative, and poetic. I found myself wishing Jen's next book would be a novel about the girl and her sister. Then, I think, Jen could give free rein to her rich imagination.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Required reading By PSD This should be required reading for people doing business internationally. While much of the focus is on China, Gish Jen really is offering a broader and more powerful way to approach cross-cultural relations. As a former vendor to the largest semiconductor company in the world, I now recognize a few of the "avocado pit" disasters that might have been avoided as business shifted from the US to Makati/Cavite to Penang to Chengdu. From board members to strategic managers to field engineers and support reps, this book can help business people understand the perspectives of partners and customers.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Engaging and Eloquent By Cheryl Savageau It would be hard to overstate the importance of this new book by Gish Jen. At a time when we need understanding across cultures so desperately, Jen has written eloquently about the differences between East and West. Jen finds the main differences in the differing ideas of self - the highly individual sense of self that the West holds, which Jen calls the "avocado pit" self; and the interdependent, "flexi-self" found, not only in the East, but in most of the non-Western world. Jen gives examples of these differences through stories and studies, and even through quizzes, so you can gauge where you fall on the independent- interdependent spectrum. It surprised me how the sense of self influences so much of our lives - not just our interactions with people - how we talk to our babies, how we teach, how we treat our elderly parents - but also how we edit our very perceptions - that the details we focus on are different and reflect the sense of self found in our society. She is careful to say that no one is completely one way or the other, and that in every society there is a range, and sub-cultures that can be more or less independent or interdependent within a dominant culture. ( Jen is from the Boston area, and uses the Patriots - a well-loved football team - as an example of a sub-culture of interdependence within a highly individual/independent dominant culture. ) I found myself engaged throughout the book, often gaining a new understanding of my own behavior and perceptions that often seem at odds with the dominant culture. She gives wonderful examples of cultural dissonance when talking about even such a seemingly innocuous thing as saying thank you - all the implications it can have depending on your cultural background. She discusses the benefits and disadvantages of both senses of self - for example, warmth vs. alienation; rights vs responsibilities; and the dangers of a society that goes too far in either direction. I read through the book once - it was a page-turner for me. Now I am in the middle of a second read, with comments and questions on nearly every page. I have rarely found a book so engaging.

A provocative and important study of the different ideas Easterners and Westerners have about the self and society and what this means for current debates in art, education, geopolitics, and business. Never have East and West come as close as they are today, yet we are still baffled by one another. Is our mantra "To thine own self be true"? Or do we believe we belong to something larger than ourselves--a family, a religion, a troop--that claims our first allegiance? Gish Jen--drawing on a treasure trove of stories and personal anecdotes, as well as cutting-edge research in cultural psychology--reveals how this difference shapes what we perceive and remember, what we say and do and make--how it shapes everything from our ideas about copying and talking in class to the difference between Apple and Alibaba. As engaging as it is illuminating, this is a book that stands to profoundly enrich our understanding of ourselves and of our world. From the Hardcover edition.