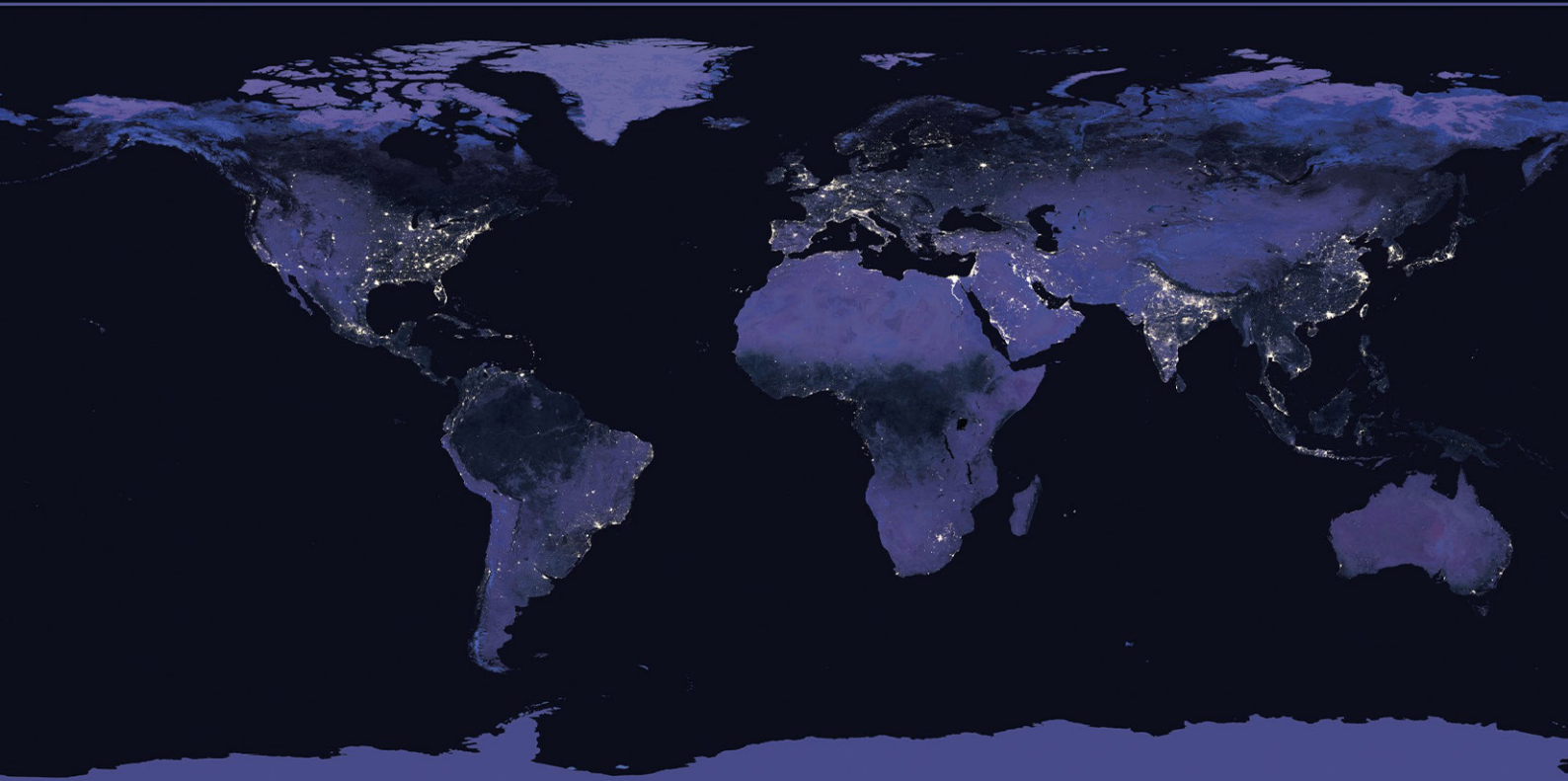


There Are No Foreign Lands



*An Inquiry Concerning
Intercultural Communication*

JEFFREY A. SHEEHAN

When I first saw the title of Jeff Sheehan's new book, There Are No Foreign Lands, I was truly intrigued, because as a former diplomat who served as Philippine Ambassador to the United States of America, the term "foreign lands" was a standard term in diplomatic jargon and did not have any derogatory aspect. While I initially did not understand why Jeff used this title, I was eager to find out. As I started to read the book, I was astounded by Jeff's hypothesis "that there are universal values and predilections which are common to all humans and which are of far more importance than superficial characteristics such as language, culture, history, religion, and ethnicity." Based on his experience having met and interacted with 13,464 people from 85 countries, he suggests that "we can understand and find common ground with any other." I was very curious to find out how Jeff would validate or support his hypothesis which seemed incredible but so inspiring and encouraging, if in fact he was right.

I now find it amazing how Jeff has used his extensive research on the 17 special friends whom he has known personally for many years and whom he profiles in the book. After an intensive analysis of their value systems, personalities, ideologies, beliefs, religions, traditions, and spirituality, he concludes that "these friends share 13 characteristics that could be emulated by others hoping to spend their lives well and meaningfully."

As a former central bank governor, corporate CEO, and ambassador to the USA, I have always thought I was a knowledgeable and committed globalist. Jeff's book has made me rethink my concept of "foreign lands." He has persuaded me that there are no foreign lands.

— Jose L. Cuisia, Jr., Manila, Philippines
Former Governor, Central Bank of the Philippines
Former CEO, Philippine-American Life Insurance
Company Former Philippine Ambassador to the USA

A gem of a book! A true internationalist, Jeff Sheehan paints evocative images of transformational leaders from across the globe. His conclusions on the elements of greatness are both intriguing and inspiring. Jeff chronicles the leaders' drive to change the world, their ability to navigate significant challenges, and their inherent humility amidst great contributions. A thought-provoking set of stories – a pleasure to read and reflect upon.

— Harbir Singh, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Mack Professor and Professor of Management
The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

I have known Jeff for almost 30 years and had the privilege of sharing quite a few memorable experiences with him. Jeff is a unique character, one of a kind. Thanks to his curiosity, his empathy for people and his charisma, he has this unique ability to reach out to people of highly diverse cultures, religions, and social backgrounds, and to go behind the mirror to apprehend what makes them special. The manner in which he paints a riveting portrait of each individual is fascinating.

Jeff is an incredible mind-reader and storyteller. He has the capacity to bring them to vivid life as we discover how each of them navigated through extraordinary inspiring trajectories. As he points out, we live on an interconnected global planet, multicultural, universal in many ways and yet the book shows how each individual remains deeply rooted. The 17 characters (some of whom I happen to know) are so unique and therefore so different from each other that no one would expect them to cross paths. Yet they have 13 things in common, namely the dispositions, values, and predilections that Jeff has identified. Readers of this anecdote-rich masterwork are in for a treat!

— Frédéric Dubois, Paris, France
President, Santé et Loisirs

Political national lines should have no role in the movement of products, services, people, and ideas. Jeff Sheehan proved this by flying 10 million miles around the world, implementing his international programs and meeting people that were very similar human beings, as proven beautifully by this book. We thank Jeff for his vision and promise to honor its spirit by remembering that there are no foreign lands.

— Odemiro Fonseca, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Co-Founder, Viena Rio Restaurantes Ltda.

Jeff Sheehan is truly an intercultural educator and diplomat who has never felt 'foreign' in his travels to more than 80 countries. Over the past three decades, I have had the pleasure of watching Jeff build personal relationships around the world as a genuine friend of all, who loves to offer his help.

I am sure that you will find this book not only interesting but also inspiring.

— Harvey H.W. Chang, Taipei, Taiwan
Former President and Chief Executive Officer, Taiwan Mobile
Former Chairman, TVBS Media, Inc.

There Are No Foreign Lands

An Inquiry Concerning Intercultural
Communication

By

Jeffrey A. Sheehan

First Edition

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Also by Jeffrey A. Sheehan

[My Year of Living Adventurously](#)
(2017)

[There Are No Foreign Lands – in Chinese as 世界无界](#)
(2019)

Flash the Lightnings, Weigh the Sun
(forthcoming)

**To
Truffle Sheehan
(2009-2021)**

Who taught me all I need to know about
Infinite Compassion

Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the
end, Some work of noble note, may yet
be done.

— *Alfred Lord Tennyson*

I want to start a virtuous cycle that will have no end.
— *Rosanna Ramos Velita*

There Are
No Foreign Lands

Preface

It was a beautiful, sunny September day. The heat of the summer had broken, and the day tasted as crisp as a ripe apple. I retired on that day after serving for 30 years as Associate Dean for International Relations at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

In anticipation of that occasion, I had rented an office and established a business which I named “Sheehan Advisory LLC” and which would serve as the cover story for any nefarious activities in which I would henceforth engage.

As I sat in my new office, I pondered what I would do next. A prize souvenir from my 30 years at Wharton was the collection of business cards I had accumulated in the course of travel to all the continents and sub-continents except Antarctica. In total, I had amassed 13,464 cards from individuals in 85 countries, as well as 10,943,568 miles on the American Airlines Frequent Flyer Program. The cards were carefully catalogued in card file boxes by country, by employer, and by name. If someone had changed jobs, I had stapled the new card to the old card(s), so in many cases I had a physical biography of that individual. I decided to go through the cards, one-by-one. This was originally an exercise in nostalgia; I had made many close friends over the years, and I thought it would be comforting to remember them.

However, as I started this task, which was not a quick process given the volume, I began removing from their designated spots the cards of those individuals for whom I had the greatest respect and affection. I had not established criteria to guide these choices; I just pulled cards when I was so moved. When I finished looking at all 13,464 cards, I examined the pile I had extracted – it numbered only 17. On closer inspection I observed that the 17 came from 17 countries, were engaged in 17 professions, spoke 13 mother tongues, were brought up in 11 spiritual traditions, and were not acquainted with one another. In short, they had nothing in common, other than my respect and affection. Or did they? At that moment, the idea for this book took shape. Why had I chosen these 17? What moved me to admire and love them? Were there characteristics that they shared? And if they did share characteristics, were there broader conclusions that could be drawn from that discovery? What follows is a long answer to these questions.

Introduction

Modernity and economic development are not the equivalents of culture and civilization, nor do the latter require the former as prerequisites. Today we say this without hesitation or skepticism, but this has not always been so. All through history, some groups “modernized” while others did not. Benedict Anderson argued that the concept of modernity was no more than a consequence of the creation of comparative history.

In practical terms, this meant that the modernized societies invented weapons that killed more efficiently, mass-produced consumer goods along with the marketing that induced the unwitting populations to purchase these doodads, and invented “leisure time” with activities and objects designed to fill it. These modern societies were indisputably more powerful. However, they made the error of deducing that power was proof of the superiority of their cultures and civilizations. In fact, those who lacked these attributes of modernity were believed to lack any culture at all and were “uncivilized.” Those who had modernized thought it was empirically evident. This was a dreadful mistake and led to untold suffering and misery.

The powerful invented more than war, consumerism, and indolence. They also invented slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, employing the assumption of their superiority as justification for mistreating their fellow humans. This justification was morally corrupt and ethically unsupportable, but the hypocrisy of the powerful only reinforced these behaviors.

Many books have documented these lamentable behaviors. Two representative examples will suffice for the purposes of this introduction. Just before the First Opium War broke out in 1839, the Duke of Wellington, speaking of the opium trade in China, pontificated that Parliament “cherished it, suggested its extension, and had deliberately looked for means of promoting it.” On the other side of the Atlantic in 1857, Fred A. Ross, an Alabama Presbyterian minister, wrote that “Man, south of the Equator – in Asia, Australia, Oceania, America, especially Africa – is inferior to his northern brother... Slavery is of God, and [should] continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family.”

This arrogance of power evolved over time in what was commonly called the “West” before it started to dissipate. At first, most people believed that different “races” had separate and distinct ancestors and that some ancestors (and therefore, some races) were naturally superior to others. This was known as polygenism. In many cases, the powerful rationalized that those they mistreated were not “human.” This belief was used as the justification for such blots on the conscience of humankind as the opium trade, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism already mentioned, and also Nazism, apartheid, genocide, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the eugenics movement, and other shameful episodes in world history.

A contrary idea led some scientists and others to rethink polygenism.. This new idea was based on something that Daniel J. Boorstin would later call the “latitudes of time” and Walter Benjamin would call “empty, homogenous time,” a single concept that describes the separate but chronologically parallel paths which geographically separated humans with common ancestry have taken on their historical journeys. This was called monogenism. In order to take other people seriously, we must understand and accept that others have been doing identical (or at least similar) things at the same time that we have been doing these things. For example, turning sounds and thoughts into non-oral form – what we now call “writing” – happened virtually simultaneously in several widely disparate and distant sites. On the other hand, putting the northern hemisphere at the top and Europe at the center of maps are not astronomical, mathematical, scientific, or natural choices.

Mercator's decision to show the north as "up" and Europe on top and in the center was both the product of Eurocentrism and a contribution to four centuries of cultural elitism.

A regrettable feature of this potentially valuable advance in thinking about human evolution was that these monogenists were also for the most part teleologists who believed that all humans must pass through the same sequence of behaviors, starting with "savagery," proceeding to "barbarism," and culminating with "civilization." Civilization was defined as the then-current state of affairs in North America and Western Europe. Native Americans were considered to be in the intermediate stage of barbarism. This hypothesis reserved the right – the duty – of "advanced," "civilized," people to subjugate, assimilate, and supervise savages and barbarians. Even Charles Darwin had ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases against sub-Saharan Africans which led him to his least scientific and most harmful assertions about race.

While this theory held out the possibility of primitive people eventually becoming civilized, it denied the possibility that so-called primitive people had civilizations and cultures. This hypothesis did not promote or enhance mutual respect. Lewis Henry Morgan, a nine-teenth century American anthropologist, was one of its early exponents. Morgan based his theory on the study of Native American tribes, especially the Iroquois, as well as his admittedly ingenious global study of kinship systems. John Wesley Powell, the Director of the Bureau of Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution from 1879 to 1902, was a follower of Morgan and had considerable influence on governmental policies promoting "acculturation" of Native Americans, by force if necessary. As with the previous approaches, the facts were made to fit the theory.

As arrogance became somewhat less respectable (or perhaps, more suspect), a new, quite revolutionary hypothesis emerged, this time based on empirical data from field work conducted by the pioneers in the academic discipline that became known as cultural anthropology. Franz Boas, and his coterie at Columbia University that included Margaret Mead, argued the novel proposition that all humans, at whatever stage of modernization and economic development, had cultures and must be considered civilized. No culture or civilization, they argued, was inherently superior to another. This, in turn, became known as cultural relativism. "The implications of the idea that we make our own agreed-upon truths was profound. It undermined the claim that social development is linear, running from allegedly primitive societies to so-called civilized ones." This new way of thinking faced some headwinds when it was introduced in the early years of the twentieth century. Regrettably, not all these headwinds have abated even one hundred years later.

After Boas, the standards of each civilization and the artifacts of each culture could henceforth be described simply as the imaginative creations of humans, none of which necessarily was better than any other. Boas argued that there was no ultimate stage of civilization toward which everyone had to strive. All civilizations were simply local adaptations, although all humans seemed to share certain behaviors. We owe respect to all humans, and must surrender our "rights" to enslave, colonize, dominate, and subjugate others whose only failing was to be economically and militarily less powerful. We were challenged by the cultural relativists to respect the cognitive equality, cultural integrity, and civilizational legitimacy of all human groups. This was a vital step forward in the history of intercultural communication – that essential but elusive ingredient in peaceful world affairs. The world was, and is, getting better.

But we are now well into the twenty-first century. War, intolerance, racism, injustice, bigotry, and discrimination, albeit at lower levels, still plague humans. Looking at the continuing problems from the perspective of the United States, it is instructive, if distressing, to consider a contemporary speech by an American politician. Former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum, in a speech on April 23, 2021, asserted that the culture of the United States is largely unchanged since it was birthed by Judeo-Christian values. "We came here and created a blank slate. We birthed a nation from nothing. I mean, there was nothing here. I mean yes, we have Native Americans, but candidly there isn't much Native

American culture in American culture.” Looking at the continuing problems from a global perspective, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in his 2019 annual report, noted that “By the end of the year, 70.8 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations.” We must not allow ourselves to conclude that we have reached the endpoint of our efforts to treat each other with empathy, respect, and compassion.

What can be done? Where do we go from here? We seem to be heading in the right direction, but we also have a long way to go. How do we take the next step in reconciling all those differences and in creating a world in which the “clash of civilizations” will be recognized as needless and will diminish? How do we as humans synchronize better our political, social, economic, and environmental efforts? And ultimately, how do we communicate better interculturally? This is the matter to which I will now turn, and from which I will form the hypothesis of this book.

My hypothesis is that there are humans today, representing a variety of cultures, civilizations, ethnicities, and spiritual traditions; speaking multiple languages; and following vastly different pursuits, who share what I believe are some common dispositions. I believe that these characteristics are not only praiseworthy in themselves but can also play a role in taking a next step in this long journey of Homo sapiens towards a world in which respectful and comprehensible intercultural communication promotes peace, equity, justice, tolerance, prosperity, and sustainability.

I say “a next step” because I am old enough to be realistic about the pace of progress. I also say “some common dispositions” because there are additional praiseworthy characteristics that are and will be needed. But I am proposing “some” dispositions and “a” next step because I have observed a remarkable congruity of characteristics among the seventeen people I extracted from my card files and who populate this book.

To phrase it slightly differently, the hypothesis of my book is that there are universal values and predilections which are common to all humans and which are of far more importance than the superficial characteristics of civilizations, such as language, cuisine, history, religion, and ethnicity. Based on my experience, which includes meeting with 13,464 people from 85 countries, I suggest that we can understand and find common ground with any other. There is no need for “foreign” lands. We are all brothers and sisters. The problem is that not everybody knows this yet. As a species, humans are still suffering from what Boorstin called an “illusion of knowledge” in regard to this topic.

In my book, I want to help curious world citizens to become more aware of the world in which they live and more proficient in intercultural communication. I intend to elucidate (not necessarily prove or validate, as I will explain soon) my hypothesis by recounting and comparing the lives, journeys, predilections, and values of the special people that I picked from my card files. Wildly dissimilar in every superficial way, they share characteristics that I believe collectively represent a good starting point through which most humans can find common ground and communicate with most other humans.

This is a book for readers from every nation, culture, religion, ethnicity, mother tongue, and profession who have an interest in how people can work together more collaboratively and productively, and how the world might be brought together for a better future. The book will be of particular interest to those who work alone or within organizations, as leaders or followers, scholars or schemers, loyalists or mutineers, and who wish to contribute to the success of a community of any size, or to achieve an idea or a dream that benefits more than themselves. It also draws on common sense conclusions collected from wisdom traditions around the world.

This is a book that takes as its primary sources the experiences of a lifetime spent at the intersection of cultures. I cannot call myself an expert in any culture other than the one into which I was born, but I have had ample opportunity to visit and learn from many other cultures. I will almost certainly be guilty of clumsy errors, embarrassing mistakes, and, probably, egregious

misinterpretations. However, I share the perspective of Anne Fadiman, who wrote in the preface to her book about the clash of Hmong refugees with the American medical system: “I have always felt that the action most worth watching is not at the center of things but where edges meet...often, if you stand at the point of tangency, you can see both sides better than if you are in the middle of either one.”

The title of this book reflects my deeply held belief that “foreign-ness” is an obsolete, destructive concept that I hope will die out from the face of the earth. I, for one, have never felt “foreign” in my travels because I have adopted each country I visited as my own, and attempted to understand the point of view of the people who lived there. I have noted that there are others who share this view, and I will quote many of them (including the seventeen whose biographies follow this Introduction) in this book.

How did I choose the people who populate this book? As noted in the Preface, it was not a scientific process. I simply chose people I have met and for whom I have the greatest affection and respect, based on their personal qualities and without a goal or quota. These are not casual acquaintances; I know them all well, in some cases for as long as 35 years.

I interviewed each of the individuals at length, in person, in dozens of cities around the world, logging hundreds of thousands of air miles. I also either met or interviewed by telephone their family members, friends, business associates, admirers, and even detractors to cross-check my observations and confirm my conclusions. I judge that each of these individuals is a heroine or a hero, not in the sense that any of them charged a mountain top to rescue fallen comrades amid a hail of bullets, but in the sense that they are ones who, in the words of Philip Zimbardo, “...are capable of resisting evil, of not giving in to temptations, of rising above mediocrity, and of heeding the call to action and to service when others fail to act.” Each of the chapters describing the life of one of these individuals tells a heroic story according to this definition.

My conclusion, following this research, was that all these friends share thirteen characteristics, and that all of these characteristics could be emulated by others hoping to spend their lives well and meaningfully. I begin this book with biographical chapters of these individuals, organized into the groups to which I have assigned them. Part II consists of an exposition of the common characteristics. While my friends differ in virtually every superficial characteristic, the construction of a complex, although hypothetical, Venn Diagram reveals the thirteen common characteristics that populate the cell in which all seventeen sets overlap.

I hope, through examining the lives of these men and women, to share what I have learned about a life well spent, devoted to the enhancement of human flourishing. My vision of this kind of a life is a composite of the lives of these individuals, from whom I have learned so much. I feel profound gratitude to them for giving me “a continuous transfusion of courage.” I hope that I can live up to their examples.

Two comments on methodology before I begin: First, my close friend and colleague Professor Jitendra Singh, former dean of the School of Business at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, was kind enough to read an early draft of this book. He pointed out an interesting challenge, namely that I needed to be careful about claiming that the qualities I had identified were the causes of the success of my heroes and heroines. Such a claim, he cautioned, would be difficult if not impossible to substantiate, and would require a much different book in which I would need to demonstrate (by an equally careful study of an equivalent group of people who did not exhibit these qualities) that the absence of these characteristics was clearly associated with a lack of success. That is not, as you will learn in the pages ahead, the book I have written.

Another good friend and colleague from the Wharton School, Professor John Zhang, said essentially the same thing after reading an early draft of the chapter on Yu Minhong, namely that es-

establishing causality would require the determination that the characteristics these people have in common were not only sufficient but also necessary for the achievements of the people I profile.

Second, Jared Diamond (whom I have never met) artfully reminded me that success is quite often attained by avoiding the causes of failure rather than picking the reasons for success. As a consequence, I have attempted to avoid any suggestion that the 13 characteristics are the reasons why my friends have succeeded. In fact, my goal has been to avoid focusing on their successes. This has been a difficult goal to achieve because their successes are abundant. However, my intended focus has been on the common dispositions. The reader can make a personal judgment as to the relationship between these dispositions and the successes of the individuals I profile. My larger point is that the 13 characteristics are fully shared by everybody and I believe represent crucial but at the same time quite accessible keys to unlocking the door to meaningful intercultural communication.

And so, with thanks to Jitendra, John, and Jared for saving me from suggesting that I am doing something that I am not, I disclaim any pretensions to social science research. My sample is small, my methodology is qualitative rather than quantitative, and what is most important, I make no claim to having found pathways to anywhere. Are there universal human dispositions, some of which are values, others of which are predilections? Is the belief that different civilizations have different values false? I think so, but my book will not offer any proof. This is why I have sub-titled my book an "inquiry," not a theory or a truth, concerning intercultural communication. I am most probably describing, in aggregate, the person I aspire to be. If I have done my job well, you may develop the same aspiration.

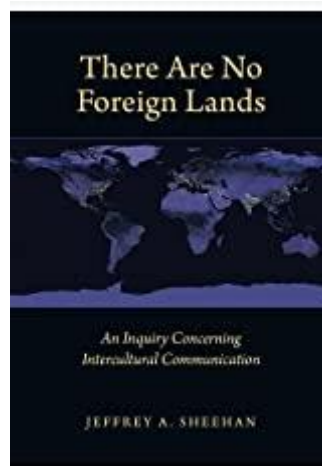
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Studying a set of extraordinary people from different nations, cultures, and traditions, Jeff Sheehan has created this wonderful Ode to H.O.P.E. – Humility, Optimism, Positivity, and Enthusiasm.

- Narayana Murthy, Founder, Infosys

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A captivating story! From the lives of 17 men and women of diverse backgrounds the author met in his countless trips to every corner of the world emerge common threads that can be woven together to create a new pattern in intercultural understanding and communication.

— **Sehoon Lee, Seoul, Korea**

Former Chief Executive Officer, HanGlas Group

*Jeff Sheehan's vision of a world where our common sense of humanity unites us more than national borders and different languages, religions, and political structures divide us is a refreshing and timely counter to the increasingly worldwide retreat from globalism into "my country first" philosophy, principles, and practices. It is a vision formed from a lifetime of working, most successfully, to advance global economic cooperation and community as Associate Dean for International Relations at one of the world's premier business schools. It is a vision that many of Dean Sheehan's generation, including me, have long viewed as a beacon pointing the way to a better and brighter future. **There Are No Foreign Lands** reaffirms and rekindles the flame that can make this beacon again shine bright. As one whose professional life and worldview have been profoundly influenced by knowing and working with Jeff, I am pleased and proud to give this fine work my strongest endorsement.*

— **Arnold J. Rosoff, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

Professor Emeritus of Legal Studies and Business Ethics,
The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania

Studying a set of extraordinary people from different nations, cultures, and traditions, Jeff Sheehan has created this wonderful Ode to H.O.P.E. – Humility, Optimism, Positivity, and Enthusiasm. Reading this insightful book brought, in me, a renewed sense of faith in humanity.

— **Narayana Murthy, Bangalore, India**

Founder, Infosys

Congratulations to Jeff Sheehan on his new book, There Are No Foreign Lands. I fully share his conviction that, as human beings, we are much more similar than we are different at the deepest level. His optimistic – even idealistic! – view of the future gives me even more motivation to stay the course and persist in breaking down barriers to intercultural communication. If you have been feeling overwhelmed recently by the news, you need to read this book. It will revive your flagging spirits.

— **Manu Chandaria, Nairobi, Kenya**

Chairman, Comcraft Group

