

# Dragons and Sutras

**Sandeep Bahl, Asia-Pacific General Manager for Air New Zealand, shares business and philosophical must-reads**



Sandeep Bahl

It's often the case with books that really strike a chord with readers that the books are not only captivating, but are read by readers at a time in their lives or careers when they seem particularly apposite. I am no exception. The books that have really played a pivotal role in my career, and in particular my career in China, were not only forward-thinking in their own right, but came into my hands at a very opportune time.

When I moved to China in 2003, enterprise was really just starting to flourish, particularly in my field, the aviation industry. China had not only embarked on modernizing ground infrastructure related to aviation, but also started grooming Chinese carriers to become fiercely competitive and ready to welcome international customers for the Beijing Olympics. In late 2005 I managed to get hold of a copy of *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make Competition Irrelevant* by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, Professors at INSEAD. As many in the field of management studies will tell you, this book was extremely innovative in the way it discussed strategies for building a marketplace, edging out the competition and creating more customers. This seemed hugely relevant to me because the competition in China's aviation sector was there, but it wasn't strong enough to 'red-

den my ocean', to speak in *Blue Ocean* terms.

Another book that really opened my mind to considering Chinese companies in a more comprehensive way was *Dragons at Your Door: How Chinese Cost Innovation Is Disrupting Global Competition* by Zeng Ming and Peter J. Williamson. That book did a great job of really illustrating that Chinese companies are growing so fast, and have a way of doing business that is completely different in ways that are difficult to imagine. I found that book included extremely helpful insights into the strategies, strengths and weaknesses of Chinese businesses.

For example, the book highlighted the low-cost-based market integration approach of many Chinese businesses, which is a great example of disruptive innovation because new markets of cheap products were being continuously created. Contrast that with the Japanese model, which was based largely on manufacturing precision. Here in China, they potentially had everything: they were good in manufacturing, they had the huge cost advantage and they had the world's largest consumer base.

These two books really pushed me to consider how I would create my own consumers and alternatives to what the competition offers.

For personal cultivation, I take a lot from an old Indian text called *Chanakya Neeti*, particularly the edition translated by B.K. Chaturvedi. It has been adopted in modern day life and business much in the same way as Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. *Chanakya* has many messages, but one that resonates with me is the question: after completing your professional mission, what do you do next? ■

## Business Bestsellers in the US

- No. 1 **Developing the Leader Within You**  
by John C. Maxwell

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- No. 2 **Overwhelmed**  
by Brigid Schulte

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- No. 3 **The Hard Thing About Hard Things**  
by Ben Horowitz

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- No. 4 **Strengths Finder 2.0**  
by Tom Rath

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- No. 5 **Lean In**  
by Sheryl Sandberg

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- No. 6 **Thinking, Fast and Slow**  
by Daniel Kahneman

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- No. 7 **Daring Greatly**  
by Brené Brown

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- No. 8 **How To Win Friends and Influence People**  
by Dale Carnegie

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- No. 9 **The Rise of Superman**  
by Steven Kotler

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- No. 10 **The Intelligent Investor**  
by Benjamin Graham

Source: Amazon (not including repeats based on format)

## Business Bestsellers in China

- No. 1 **How Will You Manage a Team?**  
by Zhao Wei

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- No. 2 **Big Data**  
by Viktor Mayer-Schonberger

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- No. 3 **Influence**  
by Robert B. Cialdini

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- No. 4 **The Effective Executive**  
by Peter F. Drucker

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- No. 5 **Currency Wars**  
by Song Hongbing

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- No. 6 **Positioning**  
by Al Ries and Jack Trout

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- No. 7 **The Solution Tango**  
by Louis Cauffman

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- No. 8 **Mobile Influence**  
by Chuck Martin

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- No. 9 **WeChat Marketing and Operations**  
by Wang Yi

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- No. 10 **My Marketing Mystery**  
by Shi Yuzhu

Source: DangDang.com