

Home ► Courses ► AGB-318-01-2184 ► Sections ► Cultural Dynamics and Global Trade ►
The Dynamics of Culture

Turn editing on

The Dynamics of Culture



1. Antecedents of Culture

Culture is the sum of the **values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and thought processes** that are **learned and shared** by a **group of people**, and **transmitted from generation to generation**.

The antecedents of culture are:

Geography

Cultural geography, the study of how geography impacts culture, has shown that humans will adapt their culture to changing geographies while also modifying their surrounding area. For instance, fishing can play a large role in the culture of those that live near the sea while the isolation of island nations can lead to more distinct cultures. The climate of a country can impact its GDP, and colder countries tend to be wealthier. Additionally, studies suggest that climate change will result in increased income inequality across the world.

Jared Diamond argues that Eurasian countries were the first to develop power as it was easier for technology and people to diffuse along the same latitude since they had similar agriculture and seasons. The natural living conditions of an area are dependent on distance to the equator; 90% of the world's population lives north of the equator, with the majority of people preferring to live between 20 and 40 degrees North. However, as population sizes grow the competition for scarce resources are increasingly leading to environmental degradation.



Similarly, wine can play an important role in culture, and most good wine tends to grow along the 45th parallel.

History

The impact of historical events can be seen in social institutions, cultural values and historical behavior. History determines how a country sees its place in the world and its attitudes toward foreign interaction. For instance, look at the relationship between the U.S. and China. For thousands of years China was the dominant world power, at one point controlling 1/3 of all wealth. In the 1800's Britain had a massive trade deficit with China, primarily due to its tea imports. However, Britain gained control of India's opium market and soon was shipping so much that the trade deficit disappeared, despite the Emperor's efforts to prevent it. As opium was technically illegal the Emperor eventually destroyed British stores in 1839, leading to a humiliating defeat during the Opium wars. After being forced to sign a treaty in 1842 that essentially opened its borders to all foreign powers, China was forced to come to terms with its loss of global prestige. In response, the Chinese started to follow Hong Xiuquan, an evangelical referred to as the "Heavenly King", leading to the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). While this revolution was squashed, in 1900 the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists fomented the Boxer Rebellion, forcing Western forces to step in after the Chinese government was not able to defeat them. Humiliated yet again, and with 20-40 million casualties, China became increasingly insular and fearful of religious movements, which helps explain their current foreign and internal policies.

Political Economy

In the modern world there have been four main approaches to government:

- Colonialism
- Fascism
- Communism
- Democracy/Capitalism

Countries have differing degrees of **nationalism**, which is an intense feeling of national pride and unity, and is often intertwined with the political environment.



Technology

It can be argued that birth control is one of the technological innovations in recent history that has had the greatest impact on institutions and cultural values in the United States. It led to a major shift in gender roles and increasing equality for women; women now outnumber men at universities and 14% of enlisted military members are now female. As technology changes culture must adapt; additionally, a country's culture can impact how investments in technology are made.

Social Institutions

There are actually many social institutions in a country, each with its own impact.

FAMILY

The positions of men, women and the family are interpreted differently in each culture, which can impact the way distinct promotional campaigns are viewed. For instance, birthrates differ globally in accordance with cultural norms. Japan's aging population has led to concerns about the decreased birthrate, leading to government programs to incentivize childbirth. Certain regions of the world prefer men over women, with dire implications for long-term gender demographics. In an attempt to improve gender equality, India offers financial support to parents of girls. The structure of families can impact attitudes from childhood; children learn egalitarianism when they address grandparents informally and individualism when they sleep alone instead of with their parents.

RELIGION

Religion is one of the first social institutions that children are exposed to outside of family. This will affect people's habits, the products they buy and how they buy them. It is necessary that marketers understand the religious traditions of their consumers. For instance, an Axe commercial that included attractive women dressed as "fallen angels" that leave Heaven after smelling the cologne was banned in South Africa for offending Christians. Chanel was forced to burn several dresses that included passages of the Koran after causing an uproar in Muslim countries.

SCHOOL

Literacy rates are an important determinant of economic growth, and there are no successful countries that have literacy rates below 50%. The subjects taught in school will impact what students learn, while the educational system will influence how they learn. Think about reasons it might be easier to market to literate populations...



MEDIA

As parents work longer hours, media replaces family time, and it becomes an effective way to influence consumer behavior.



Government

One of the perceived roles of government is to influence people for their "own good". Changes in government will have strong impacts on the people; think about the difference between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the creation of the European Union. Culture and government are often intertwined, as seen in the French ban on burkas, political influences on school curriculum and behavioral mandates such as smoking cessation.

Corporations

Most innovations are introduced to society by corporations. Historically, merchants have been instrumental in cultural diffusion and multinational firms are able to access to ideas from around the world. In fact, salted caramel was originally a uniquely French flavor preference, but has now spread globally.

