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Cultural Norms and Views  
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### Abstract

In our work group we discussed the differences, and noticed the similarities, between our different countries' cultures, values, views, and norms. During our meetings we discussed the similarities and differences between the Indian, Chinese, and American education systems. Alongside this we discussed the different languages that are taught and spoken in each country, as well as gender roles in each culture. We also discussed how each country treats foreigners and those a part of the LGBT+ community, as well as discussing how each culture views death. Throughout our discussions we learned a lot about each culture through the eyes of those living in it. We also had extra conversations about cultural differences that were not included into our presentation. This was due to time constraints as well as relevance to our topics. Given everything that we learned from each other on our chosen topics, it was very interesting to see what everyone else learned and shared in their groups.

As mentioned in the abstract, our group covered a number of different topics related to our cultural norms and views. As an American student, I knew about the information that was related to America already. However, what I learned during our group meetings was the information about the Chinese and Indian students' cultural values and views. There was a lot of information that I was unaware of, as well as some information that I suspected, but wasn't certain of but had confirmed by the other students. For example, when we were discussing LGBT+ I suspected that the younger and more urban populations were more accepting of them, which was confirmed by the students from India and China. However, there were still plenty of things that I learned from the discussions on this topic, such as some history of homosexuality in China. The earliest recorded homosexuality in China appeared during the Shang Dynasty two thousand years ago, according to the Chinese students. Another thing I learned was that before colonial Europeans arrived with their beliefs the natives of India appeared to accept LGBT+

people. As written on our slide “Hindu and Vedic descriptions of demigods, saints and even the Supreme Lord outstripping gender norms & manifesting combinations of sex and gender. Trans people were accepted in ancient India and referred to by terms like ‘tritiya prakriti’, ‘kliba’ and ‘napunsaka’”. Tritiya prakriti translates into “third nature”, and is used to refer to a third sex, outside of the binary of male and female. Kliba in Purana glossary means “A deity”, which could reference the images of demigods, saints, and other figures being more than male or female. This would mean that transgender people, back in pre-colonial India, might have been considered “god-like” (this is my own musings, not anything that was said or confirmed by the Indian students).

Other topics that we covered were how each culture viewed death and dying. In India it can vary based on the religion that one follows. For example, Hindus believe that when a soul dies, it gets born into a new body. This cycle, known as “samsara”, only ends when a soul “realizes its true nature”. This realization is referred to as “moksha”. For those in China death is something that most people feel uncomfortable discussing. They have a belief of “There is nothing when you die, so live well”. There is also a superstition of “not naming babies after living people in case death takes them instead”.

Another topic that was discussed was how each culture viewed and treated foreigners. Going into this topic I had an idea that more populated areas that see a lot of tourists or foreigners would view outsiders welcome in these areas but did not consider it a big deal for them to be there. I was right when the Chinese and Indian students shared their knowledge on this subject. The real learning I got was in the descriptions I got of the rural areas. In China foreigners are “treated with interest, curiosity, and slight caution as most foreigners don’t come to those areas”. This would make sense if someone from outside your area showed up. The reaction is slightly different in India however as in India there is the concept of Atithi Devo Bhava or “Guest is equivalent to God”. So in urban or rural areas guests are treated well, regardless of how often they are seen. Though they are treated with a bit more respect and excitement than urban areas due to less foreigners traveling in the rural areas. Another thing that was brought up by the Indian students is that people with lighter skin are better received than those with darker skin. This was thought to be the result of European colonization.

Other topics that were covered were the different languages that are spoken in each country, gender roles, and each cultures’ education system. I was extremely surprised to learn

about how many different languages are in India (122 major languages, 1599 other languages). Overall I feel like I learned a lot from the work group I was a part of, and I wish that we had had more time to have our discussions. Only being able to meet and discuss every other week didn't feel like enough time to me. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to have these conversations with everyone though!

In regards to the rest of the quarter, outside of the work group, I felt like I learned interesting bits of Chinese history and culture. Learning about the first, and only, empress of China (Wu Zetain) was fascinating. The amount of ambiguity surrounding her and her history really made me think critically. Studying the Song Dynasty was also interesting. Learning about how it was split into Northern and Southern Song, and the cultural and artistic difference between the two was a treat to explore. Overall I enjoyed my time in this class, and I felt that I learned a lot.