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Culture

American anthropologist Clifford James Geertz defines culture as, “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life” (Geertz). The second reading on culture delves deeper into this definition by explaining that culture is developed and acquired through sharing experiences with one’s social group that requires a set of behaviors that mediate adaptation to their given environment. There are thousands of different environments in our world; therefore, there are thousands of different cultures. These descriptions of culture are important, but especially for those falling under the category of having an ethnocentric mindset. Those with an ethnocentric mindset tend to view their own culture as superior to others and to judge other cultures by the standards and values of their own. This is a very common occurrence in today’s world, but can be overridden when going into places with an open mind and being aware of one’s own bias. The second reading on culture also explains we can override the ethnocentric mindset and replace it with the belief that “we are all humans”. The article highlights ideas developed by early anthropologists that explain how the set of customs one develops depends on where they are born and from whom they learned from. Customs learned by one person can easily be learned by another and the pattern goes on. This idea exemplifies that we are all human. To further develop a more unbiased lens of culture, one can look into cultural relativism. When acknowledging an aspect of a new culture, you can consider why they are doing it and relate it back to what people in your country do instead. This contrast of action is neither negative nor positive, it just is a product of the people and the environment. Before I came to Taiwan, I was in Vietnam. I had barely done any reading or research on the culture of the country before arrival - all I knew was to not put chopsticks in bowls vertically. Upon arrival I had an extreme culture shock and truly up until now I had not understood where my uneasy feelings about the trip came from. Their culture was completely different from America. On the streets it was extremely quiet. The way they prepared food was unique and the means of transportation scared me. The whole time I was there I was comparing it to life back in America and dwelling on the differences, which I now understand is an ethnocentric outlook. Since being here in Taiwan, I have tried to embrace the differences and fight through discomfort. The biggest change for me here is the toilet seats built into the ground. At first, I was disgusted, but now my outlook is as simple as “this is what their toilets are here just as we have our own toilets in America”. I am really enjoying my time here and am especially thankful to learn new cultural aspects of the country from new friends I meet along the way. I am planning to ask my mom for a water boiler for my room back at Clemson once I return to the states.

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Social and Economic Transformations in Contemporary China

The overall shift from the collectivist to individualist view of self led rapidly to the social and economic transformation of contemporary China's cultural conception of person, self, family, and moral imperative and experiences. In the first reading, *The Changing Moral Landscape*, it discusses the shift in traditional values. The author Yunxiang Yan conducted a study in 2008 on nine young people in ShangHai who traveled to Sichuan after the earthquake. The first interviewer expressed that she gifted her family 3,000 of the 3,500 yuan she earned per month from work. Yan was shocked and expressed that he thought she was a good filial daughter. The woman laughed and explained, "You are wrong again. I am quite filial. Why? Do you know what my parents' biggest hope is? My happiness! If I live a happy life, they will be happy. This is exactly what I am doing, and they are indeed very happy" (Yan 2). This response shows a shift from the traditional views of filial piety from the parents wanting the child to take care of them rather than live their own life to parents wanting the best for their children rather than their own wellbeing as a response to new education. To add onto this, the idea of individualism versus collectivism. Traditional Chinese ethics was collectively oriented. There was a lot of controversy around this shift but it ended up being taught in classes and in turn inspired the country's youth. A 17 year old girl that Yan interviewed explained that she learned, "by lifting yourself up, you will also lift up your whole family" (Yan 3). This controversial concept led to a moral crisis in 1980 that ultimately pushed the shift's progression along. The crisis started when a female worker Huang Xiaojun sent a letter to the official mouthpiece of China's Communist Youth League. Editors revised the letter and combined it with ideas from another letter written by a college student named Pay Yi. The letter overall expressed the ideas that Communist ideas were far from reality and that selfishness was a natural part of human nature. After much debate it was concluded that self development was the moral and best way to make a contribution to society. With all of that being said, these new ideas of individualism led to a shift in the economic and socioeconomic realm of China. A new modern middle class emerged and private housing became popular. Class became an ongoing and changing process that one was not stuck in, there was hope to move up and fear of moving down. The first text stated, "if you look and act like someone of a higher class, you will become that person" (Yan 3). The new middle class in China today is still in its early stages, but is growing rapidly. Overall the new ideas of individualism in modern China has strayed China away from their originally communal values, yet is still improving their economy drastically.

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Healthcare in Contemporary China

This past week we learned about Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The first article, *Does it Take a Miracle*, discusses the concept of miracles in healthcare cases when using TCM. The article uses Dr. Li, a renowned doctor in Shanghai as an example of how these miracles happen. In the article it is explained how traditional Chinese medicine is able to fill in the cracks where biomedicine fails. The article states, "Practitioners readily cite as a fact that, in everyday practice, traditional Chinese medicine is able to do what biomedicine cannot, and, even more strikingly, that it sometimes defies 'death sentences' by biomedical doctors" (Zhan 3). Because of this, Dr. Li uses both TCM and western practices to treat his patients and is very successful doing so. The second reading touches on the TCM approach of how you fuel your body, or in other words: using food as medicine. In traditional Chinese medicine, food can be the medication; some say that food and medicine come from the same ingredients. The key ingredients for the foods include: ginger, garlic, goji berries, mushrooms, and green tea. All of which can be prepared in a certain way to improve the overall well being of the body - most of the time boiled. Herbs are also very important and it is very common for a patient's medicine to be a concoction of herbs in a tea.

In traditional Chinese medicine, doctors view the body entirely differently than we do in America. The view point is centered around the location and system of Qi which is a form of energy located within the body. Also, doctors use the five elements: fire, wood, water, earth, and metal to determine the balance of one's body. These elements are all attached to certain parts of the body, for example, the kidneys and bladder are associated with water; the heart and intestines are associated with fire. With this information and the symptoms of the patient, the doctor can provide a medicine that will balance out the five elements.

After learning about traditional Chinese medicine in class, we all got to see it and experience it in practice. At the clinic we were taught first hand about the treatments and regimens they offer there. They had their own room to concoct medicine using herbs. There were machines that measured them out and pressed them to form a substance that is then boiled. The practice used a lot of teas as medicine. Also, we were able to experience acupuncture. The point of the acupuncture is to feel the qi inside of your body by inserting the needle into one's meridian lines. If you twist the needle there is a tingling sensation in the area that is actually the feeling of your qi. I did not like it! The last thing we tried was the healing massage. The massage is called Tui Na and the purpose of it is to regulate qi and blood circulation in the body. The massage can also improve one's immune system and help with mental health. Overall, I was very interested in

this week's unit and hope to use some regimens in Chinese medicine like drinking herbal tea and receiving Tui Na in the future.