

# Cultural differences essay



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This paper outlines the differences in the cultures of the United States versus Asian Indian and Vietnamese cultures. I will look at these countries and make not only a comparison based on cultures, but also comparisons from a business perspective. Although there are many differences in general societies, some issues such as women in the workplace, and images in the media, stand across many borders.

Using the United States as my comparison culture I will first discuss the customs, beliefs, and values of Americans as a society. Americans value making something of their lives in terms of family, and work from an early age. As children we are told that we can do and be anything we want.

We believe that everyone has equal opportunity to go to school, find a good job, marry and live happily every after. These ideas are actually far fetched compared with reality, but still some of the beliefs we hold true.

Americans value achievement, personal success, and independence. We feel it is important to climb the ladder of success in the workforce and focus on constant improvement.

### Indian Culture

The following are a few of the values, and beliefs of those of Asian Indian decent. There is a heavy emphasis on family, religion and social issues.

Under one roof it is not uncommon for a husband, wife and also the mother and father of the husband or wife to all be living together.

When a woman is married it is custom for the mans family to take the woman into their home. Even after having children, or becoming able to

support their family on their own, the couple will continue living as an extended family. Elders are seen as having wisdom, and dignity, very unlike the American culture where elderly are shunned and thought to be worthless.

Religion is an important part of many people in India. Indian people integrate religion to every aspect of their lives- from daily chores, to education and politics. Hinduism is the dominant faith; however Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are also practiced in India. Each religion has its own dance, music, heroes, legends, pilgrimage sites, and even culinary specialties, which are all celebrated by various festivals though out communities in India.

Some of the social issues that concern Indians are the promotion of democracy, freedom from discrimination, independence of thought, and rights of women and children. The government and voluntary agencies have joined in order for the society to find ways to solve these issues and strive for equal opportunities for people from all income levels, and gender.

### Vietnamese Culture

In Vietnam the some of the values, beliefs and customs deal with nature, scholastic achievement and family. Many businesses in Vietnam strive to make products that are environmentally safe and also produce goods with equipment that have green (eco/ozone friendly) trademarks. People will have more respect of those companies who place value in how their products are made and what goes into them.

Scholastic achievement is important to many Vietnamese and many are very strong and determined in achieving their goals. Their scholastic goals may be to finish a secondary education, or to attend a university and start their own business. Although not as focused solely on achievement as Euro-Americans, Vietnamese do have high hopes in scholastic and business arenas.

Family is also a strong value in Vietnamese culture. Large families are traditional and the elderly/grandparents are taken care of by their children, or grandchildren until they die. Children are to live at home until they are married, at that point the woman will move in with the man's family.

Polygamy was legal in Vietnam until 1959; at that point only the first wife a man took was then considered his wife, all others were dissolved.

As in India, family also plays a large role in Vietnamese culture. In America it is often questioned why someone would choose to live close to his or her parents rather than break away from their family. Extended family simply is not as valued by Americans. Starting one's own family may be a big importance, however remaining close to parents, aunts, grandparents, is not as valued.

### Business Perspective

Mary Kay-Dallas, Texas- beauty products

Company's mission- Mary Kay's mission is to enrich women's lives. We will do this in tangible ways, by offering quality products to consumers, financial opportunities to our independent sales force, and fulfilling career to our

employees. We also will reach out to the heart and spirit of women, enabling personal growth and fulfillment for the women whose lives we touch. We will carry out our mission in a spirit of caring, living the positive values on which our company was built.- taken from [www. marykay. com](http://www.marykay.com)

Mary Kay, being one of the leading cosmetic industries aims to give women not only a quality product, but to make them become active in the company. Following the American Dream, Mary Kay gives women the opportunity to not only buy products but also to become their own independent seller.

Women are told they can achieve a multitude of success ranging from financial security to the pink Cadillac. Mary Kay values achievement in women and the idea that anyone can go from mere independent beauty rep to head of her own team of representatives in a matter of moments.

Unlike the research I found from other countries there is no emphasis on eco-friendly or environmental practices. The website for Mary Kay showed pictures of women whom belong to many different racial backgrounds, unlike the other companies.

Ayurveda- New Delhi, India- beauty, skin products

Companys Vision- Combii Organochems (companys creator) philosophy of activating the body to help itself, so that healing and correction can take place from within, continues to spearhead the company, to attain with its Herbline range of products, a greater level of product improvement, quality enhancement and customer satisfaction. taken from [www. herbline. com](http://www.herbline.com)

Ayurveda is a product line made by Herbline, which creates beauty, skin and hair products. This company values herbal remedies, creating products that are not tested on animals, and packaging their products in recyclable materials. With these strong values I also find it interesting that Ayurveda markets a skin lightener, which brings in more than \$100 million dollar a year, but has also been a huge controversy recently in India.

The advertisements seen and major celebrities in India all are more highly praised and are given better roles based on how light their skin is. Although the company has strong environmental views, it is also contributing to a market that is causing many young girls to believe, the fairer your skin, the more beautiful you will be. That is very much the American culture, and I am sure our media influence on India has caused some of the insecurities of darker skinned women.

Ayurveda does have a diversity and opportunity statement that reads- We value diversity and have clear policies and procedures to promote equal opportunities in diverse cultures. We value employees from varied backgrounds as they enrich our culture and support our commercial success. Our group-wide Equal Employment Opportunities & Diversity Policy emphasizes that we recruit and promote employees on the basis of their suitability for the job without discriminating on grounds of race, color, ethnic or national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, marital status, or disability. We have clear procedures to promote and monitor diversity and the Board receives regular reports on progress and how best practice is shared across the group.

Im not sure how recent this statement was written but it strongly relates the Affirmative Action laws in the U. S. Whether or not these are actually followed is another question. Companies may have these in place but still may not practice them.

Sai Gon Cosmetics-Ho Chi Mihn City, Vietnam-cosmetics

Companys Vision- The company promises to deliver products that meet customers demand about quality, prices, and timely delivery. The company will continuously improve products quality to satisfy the customers requirements. We pledge that all of our employees are properly trained to implement and maintain policy.

This company has strong values on making customers happy, and also to keep up with environmental issues in order to continually improve and deliver to customers a safe non damaging product.

This concept seems surreal as an American. I rarely look to see how the products Im using are made, if they are tested on animals, or even if they are damaging to the earth. It really makes me feel ignorant and says a lot about society as a whole that we are more concerned with the actual product than with what goes into it.

I could not find any diversity statements within the Sai Gon Cosmetics website, although it does state that their products are exported to U. S, Australia, New Zealand, among other countries. I did find out that Vietnam celebrates an International Womens Day, which I thought to be unique.

Personal Interviews- Priya Mani

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I interviewed Priya Mani, whose family is from India. Her father came to the United States to get his doctorate and he later flew back to India to be married. Priya lived there first fourteen years of her life before moving to the U. S. I asked her about life in India, and some of the major differences in the cultures.

Priya told me that the culture in India, despite what Americans may think, is very diverse. There are so many languages and dialects, holidays and religions and it is almost impossible to detect where someone is from based on appearance. I know this is Americans favorite game, look at someone and guess, Where is she from? Shes dressed a certain way and talks a certain way so she must be this is not something you can do in India, spot someone out and guess his/her whole background.

When I asked Priya about religion and family I was shocked about how open she was to telling me her fears and thoughts. She went right into talking about her familys own religious practices and a few secrets she holds.

My family all go to temple, and I go because I cannot fight with them. But really, I have a boyfriend, he is white and sometimes he reads me the Bible. I had never heard things before like what I read in the Bible. I want to be a Christian, but know I cannot say anything to my family. My family thinks he is my friend; weve been together for two years. My oldest sister is engaged and she hasnt told our parents. I dont want to hide everything but I have to.

My grandmother, mothers side, came to America shortly after my parents arrived. She speaks little English but I taught her enough to take the exam



and become an American citizen. She is amazing; our family would be nothing with my grandmother.

Living in America there is so much more freedom. My grandmother and mother take painting and sculpting classes, my mother takes music lesson- a new instrument every week it seems! My sister and I both went to college. None of the opportunities would be open to us if we were still in India.

Janine Phan

Janines family came from Vietnam when she was only six, but she spends summers in Vietnam visiting family and is fluent in Vietnamese. Much like Priya, Janine talked about strong family ties and the closeness she feels to her extended family.

I never really identified with my culture I guess until recently. Someone was looking at pictures in my room of my family and me and said, Whats this, you were in the Peace Corps? Volunteered with a Chinese family? That is my family. Thats when I decided to talk to my Ba Noi, grandmother, about my culture. Im still learning a lot, but now I feel better connected to the rest of my family.

When I go to Vietnam my family who are still there all ask many questions about America, most of my family came in the early 1990s but I still have some in Vietnam. And sometimes at my house I feel like I am in Vietnam. I will go home and all of my uncles, aunts, cousins, and my grandparents will all be there. I was recently in New York and a friend of mine said, Lets go to China town! Are you kidding, I live in China town, just come to my house.

I know it sounds stereotypical, and this is my own family I'm talking about, but most of my aunts in America have opened nail shops, one in San Francisco and two in Tennessee. They all say to me, Graduate college and come work in nail shop if you need a job. I know they are just being nice but I'm not working in the nail shop after graduation. In Vietnam the most a woman can do is sell fruits, and vegetables it seems. Now, everyone comes to America because you can do anything, be anything you want. Sure there will be some people who tell you no, but really there are so many options.

### Conclusion

Writing this paper has opened my eyes to many things. I have always talked about white privilege in other classes and I knew it existed, but after doing the interviews and researching the countries I realized how privileged I really am. To be able to work, date and marry where or whom I want is such a blessing.

I also realized that many of the stereotypes of Americans might actually be valid. We consume so much and rarely think about our actions or what we are doing to the environment. Each of the companies abroad had environmental issues as being very important, in the American company there was nothing like that stated.

This paper was a very good project, leaving our comfort zones to speak to unknown, diverse people is important. Everyone has such interesting backgrounds, stories all one has to do is sit down and ask. People aren't mean, they aren't rude, we are only scared to make the first move and start

something. Now I know not to have that fear because maybe these people want to talk, but no one has asked them to speak.

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