

Cultural Snapshot: Korea

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- Confucianism, along with Buddhism and Taoism, is the single greatest influence.
- Confucian principles offer structured moral and social codes. The “Five Relationships” prescribe behavior between ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, old and young, and between friends. If you fall outside of any of these relationships, you do not, effectively, exist.
- Christianity is on the rise in Korea. Korea has more Christians than any other Asian nation except the Philippines.

LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- English is a **subject-verb-object** language, while Korean is a **subject-object-verb** language. An American speaking with a Korean might need to exercise patience, as the Korean speaker might seem to be taking too long to “get to the point.”
- Americans tend to be expressive, while Koreans might be viewed as non-expressive. In Korean society, for example, it is regarded as light-hearted or frivolous to display enthusiasm, and considered a virtue to hide one’s feelings.
- A Korean child might not look straight into a teacher’s eyes, since holding the eyes and head to the side is a sign of respect.
- **Nunchi**: an ability to guess or sense another’s feelings, sentiments and thinking by perceiving the environment and atmosphere that surrounds the situation.
- **Kibun**: inner feelings or mood. In interpersonal relationships, keeping the kibun of all parties in good order often takes precedence over all other considerations.
- The American way of thinking is direct while the Korean way is indirect. Americans tend to move from the specific to the general, while Koreans do the reverse.
- Relationships involve a “loss of ego,” in the sense that one’s behavior is motivated by the desire to please others.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

- Proper interpersonal relationships are all-important among Koreans, and there is little concept of equality in relationships. Vertical rather than horizontal relationships are the norm.
- The traditional family is a vastly extended one, based on a group of relatives connected to an individual through the father.
- The father is the unquestioned head of household.
- There is a deep respect for elders.
- Koreans are group-oriented, and individuality is subordinate to one’s group, such as family, school class, or business associations.

EDUCATION

- Koreans have great respect for learning and scholastic achievement, and teachers are held in the highest esteem.
- The Korean educational system is highly competitive and achievement oriented.
- The parents’ expectations for their children at school, in both academic and social areas, are very high.



CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- Rice is a staple of the Korean diet, as is Kimch'i, a spicy, pickled vegetable dish (often made with cabbage). Korean meals are not served in courses but all at once.
- Koreans do not need feel the need to make conversation during meals, but find it perfectly acceptable to make noise while chewing or having soup.
- An individual's 1st birthday and 60th birthday are cause for tremendous celebration. This is related to the traditional East Asian calculation of time in 60-year cycles.
- Many annual holidays in Korea involve family ceremonies dedicated to veneration of the departed ancestors, including the ritual offering of food and drink.
- Koreans do not avoid bodily contact in crowds or public places. In Korea, there is not even a word for "privacy."

References:

Chu, H. (1993). *The Korean Americans: Multiethnic reminder*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 371 106).

Loridas, L. (1988). *Culture in the classroom: A cultural enlightenment manual for educators*. Lansing, MI: Michigan State Dept. of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 303 941).

Microsoft Corporation. (1993-1999). Korea. *Microsoft® Encarta® encyclopedia 2000* [Electronic database]. Redmond, WA: Author.



Cultural Snapshot: The Philippines

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- The Philippines is the only country in Asia where Christianity is the majority religion.
- The majority of the population (about 80 percent) are Roman Catholic. About 5 percent are Muslims who live mostly in the southern part of the Philippines. There is also a Philippine Independence Church, some Buddhists, and a small number of animists.
- One Filipino trait is a deep sense of propriety, also known as **delicadeza**. One never asks for too much or displays excessive emotions, lest they be accused of a lack of delicadeza.
- **Pakikisama**, or getting along with others is another important value. The group's will, objectives and goals are always more important than the individual, thus it is best to go along with the majority.
- **Utang na loob**, which is the root of giving and receiving of favors, is also very important. A favor given should be reciprocated, creating a web of debts of gratitude that can extend through generations.

LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- Although residents of the Philippines speak some 80 dialects in total, Pilipino (also called Tagalog) is the national language.
- While many Filipino-Americans speak excellent English and use proper grammar and spelling, they often have a different way of pronouncing English words (pronouncing “f” as “p” or “th” as “d,” for example). Native English speakers sometimes have difficulty understanding Filipino-Americans' accents, especially when talking over the telephone.
- In fact, some Filipino immigrants do not teach their children Tagalog and speak only English at home, because they do not want their children to grow up speaking accented English.
- In conversation, Filipino Americans frequently blend English phrases with Pilipino words and phrases.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

- In the Philippines, the typical family is composed of one elementary family (father, mother, and children), with the addition of one or more relatives, including grandparents.
- The interests of the family—not the individual—take priority.
- There is a deep respect for elders. Less common today, one way this was manifested was the use of the “bless gesture.” An elder's hand is offered to a younger person, who takes the elder's hand, brings it to his or her forehead, and then slowly releases it.
- Children in many homes call their brothers and sisters by different terms depending on their birth order. For example, the oldest son is called **kuya** or **kuyang** (by all younger siblings), while the second son is called **diko**, etc. Daughters have their own equivalent titles, beginning with **até** for the oldest.
- Hospitality is paramount in Filipino culture. A guest/visitor is the most important person. A Filipino family will commonly give up its bedrooms, even the master bedroom, to accommodate guests.



EDUCATION

- Filipinos place strong value on education.
- While many Filipino students have the ability to read English, their oral vocabulary knowledge can be limited, thus hindering comprehension of written material.

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- Filipino culture is often described as a blending of Western and Eastern influences.
- Western influences in Filipino culture include Christianity, English language, Spanish language, and the American educational system and institutions.
- Asian aspects include loyalty to family ties, respect for elders, respect for authority, the importance of not losing face, the importance of education, and Asian cuisine.
- Filipinos share a tremendous enjoyment of food and cooking. Filipino cuisine has Chinese, Malay and Spanish influences. Favorite dishes of non-Filipinos at parties and in Filipino restaurants include **pansit** (rice noodles) and fried **lumpia** (meat egg rolls).

References:

Bautista, V. (2001). The Filipino Americans: Yesterday and today. In *The Filipino Americans (1763-present): Their history, culture, and traditions* (2nd ed.). Retrieved December 28, 2001, from http://www.filipino-americans.com/yes_today.html

Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. (2001). *Halo-halo: The sweet mix of east and west in Filipino culture*. DeKalb, IL: Author. Retrieved December 28, 2001, from http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tagalog/Tagalog_Default_files/Philippine_Culture/halo_halo.htm

Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. (2001). *The Philippines: Singular and plural*. DeKalb, IL: Author. Retrieved December 28, 2001, from http://www.seasite.niu.edu/tagalog/Tagalog_Default_files/Philippine_Culture/philippines_singular_and_plural.htm

PinoyCityUSA.com. *Customs and traditions*. Retrieved December 27, 2001, from <http://www.pinoycityusa.com/customs/customs.htm>



Cultural Snapshot: Vietnam

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

- Buddhism is the official state religion in Vietnam and practiced at some level by the majority of the population.
- Many customs are rooted in both the Confucian respect for education, family, and elders, and the Taoist desire to avoid conflict.
- Fifteen percent of Vietnamese are practicing Catholics. Priests of this faith are held in high esteem.
- Older persons are considered very knowledgeable and wise.
- Sparing another person's feelings is considered more important than factual truth.
- Stoicism and emotional restraint are highly respected personal traits.

LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

- Vietnamese has three main dialects and is a tonal language with six basic tones.
- Verbs do not change forms, articles are not used, nouns do not have plural endings, and there are no prefixes, suffixes, or distinctions among pronouns.
- To show respect, Vietnamese will bow their heads to a superior or elder. When talking, one should not look steadily at a respected person's eyes. This also applies to teacher and student interactions.
- When greeting, Vietnamese often bow slightly to each other and frequently join hands. Higher-ranking people (such as the head of the family) are greeted first. Women do not shake hands with each other or with men.
- Summoning a person with a hand or finger in the upright position is reserved only for animals or inferior people. Between two equals it is a provocation. To summon a person, the entire hand with the fingers facing down is the only appropriate hand signal.
- There is an emphasis on indirect, yet open, ways of revealing feelings.
- Children are taught not to be outspoken or to show off their knowledge.
- Praising someone profusely is often regarded as flattery, and sometimes mockery. Most people are very modest and deflect praise.
- To avoid confrontation or disrespect, many Vietnamese will not vocalize disagreement. Instead of relaying negative communication, people may not answer a question.
- Speaking in a loud tone with excessive gestures is considered rude, especially when done by women.
- Many Vietnamese will smile easily and often, regardless of their underlying emotion, so a smile cannot automatically be interpreted as happiness or agreement. They may laugh in situations that other cultures may find inappropriate. This laughter is not ridicule or beratement.

FAMILY & FRIENDS

- The family is large and extended with three generations often living in the same household. There is a strong sense of unity among family members and sharing resources is emphasized.
- Children have a great deal of respect for their parents and are expected to be obedient.
- Siblings must get along with each other. Older children must yield to the younger ones, and the younger ones must respect the older ones.
- Children often live with the family until they marry, no matter what age. There is a high degree of family involvement in one's personal life.
- The father makes most of the decisions with his wife's consent. If the father is absent, the mother presides over the family, and if both parents are gone, the eldest son or daughter makes decisions.

EDUCATION

- Education is highly valued in Vietnamese culture. Parents expect their children to learn as much as possible and education is seen as the only way to secure a position in society and a better way of life.
- Education is the formation of the whole person, not only the knowledge of the sciences.
- Vietnamese school idiom: "Behavior first—learning will follow."
- The teacher is highly respected in Vietnamese culture.
- Traditionally, individual meetings with teachers occur only when behavior problems or learning problems arise, so parents may not understand the concept of a parent-teacher conference.
- Parents expect homework for their children. If they perceive the amount as inadequate, parents will often create additional homework.



CULTURE & CUSTOMS

- **Tet** is the Vietnamese New Year, celebrated on the first day of the first month on the lunar calendar, usually between January 19 and February 20. The first day is spent at home with family and paying respect to one's ancestors. The second day is to honor teachers, and the third day is to visit friends. It is a time to pay debts, forgive others, improve self, and make friends out of adversaries.
- Dermabrasive procedures based on hot/cold physiology are often used to treat coughs, headaches, nausea, backache, motion sickness and other maladies. The procedures consist of pulling or pinching the skin, rubbing oiled skin with the edge of a coin, or by "cupping," which is accomplished by heating up the air in a cup, then placing it onto the skin. The resulting bruises from these procedures are often misconstrued as child abuse.
- It is disrespectful to touch another person's head. Only an elder can touch the head of a child.
- Traditionally, Vietnamese people list their family name first, then their middle name, with their first name listed as last. Most names can be used for either gender.
- When inviting a friend on an outing, the person offering the invitation pays for the bill.
- Vietnamese may not take appointment times literally, and will often arrive late so as not to appear overly enthusiastic.
- In Vietnam, corporal punishment for children was the norm. Parents are sometimes frustrated with changing discipline tactics when coming to the U.S., as they feel their children often lack respect for their elders as a result.

References:

LaBorde, P., M.D. (1996). *Vietnamese cultural profile*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Harborview Medical Center. Retrieved December 21, 2001, from http://www.ethnomed.org/ethnomed/cultures/vietnamese/vietnamese_cp.html

Loridas, L. (1988). *Culture in the classroom: A cultural enlightenment manual for educators*. Lansing, MI: Michigan State Dept. of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 303 941)

Zhou, M. & Bankston, C.L., III. (2000). *The biculturation of the Vietnamese student* [ERIC Digest No. 152]. New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 439 185)

