Japan Culture Analysis: Conflict Management Style

Japanese culture is miscellaneous and distinctive and is one of the most developed countries in the world within the past century. The new ideas and developments within their culture still abide by their traditional values. Japan is home to many subcultures that contribute different aspects to every society, both urban and rural. With Japan re-evaluating their own values and goals, the Japanese culture continues to fluctuate in all components. The genderlect theory can be applied to Japanese culture. This theory alters the way Japan chooses to see how a woman and man need to speak. It is important to study the cultural differences because there is an obvious language barrier between America and Japan. Americans need to learn and understand other cultures so they can comprehend the diverse cultures from a cross-cultural perspective. The genderlect theory reflects how some traditional Japanese values never evolved. Women are expected to speak differently than men because of their social inferiority. The values are deeply connected to Japanese history. Throughout Japan's rough history, they experienced certain things to isolate them from the rest of the world, forcing them to create a unique culture. Japan has represented a non-confrontational conflict management approach throughout their evolution. Their most evident management style is avoidance. Japanese relationships mostly revolve around avoidance and distracting the opposite party from the actual problem. Their problems never get solved, so Japan is typically seen as a high context and non-confrontational country.

International Culture

Although Japanese culture is stereotypically mended in with chinese culture, the two can not be more different. Japanese culture is proven to be more lenient and have a booming capitalist system whereas the Chinese culture has more of a communist government and economy. In Japanese culture, traditional food is viewed as more than food but a world heritage. Thus, a Japanese meal's goal is not only to taste good, but transmit knowledge to future generations. The climate in Japan varies drastically, which allowed each city to adjust their crops to the climate of their area. This encouraged tourism, where people travel through Japan seeking a unique food experience. Culinary tourism benefited Japanese economy and culture by supporting villages and local communities. Seasonal food is important for Japan because they base their diet on the season of the year. To stay healthy, Japanese children learn important values in their elementary schools. Bento boxes influenced, to a certain extent, the personality of these children either by by helping them socialize or exclude them from other children. A meal in Japan is very important to society because there is more than eating; there are certain rules and etiquette to follow when enjoying Japanese cuisine. Through a meal in Japan, people socialize, build bonds, cooperate, and help develop society. Without the variety of food available in Japan, the culture would not have become as evolved as it is today (Skemman, 2017). Another cultural difference is music. Japanese music, the art concerned with combining vocal and instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression.As stated before K-pop is one form of Japanese music however, Korea served as a bridge to Japan for many Chinese musical ideas. The island isolation of Japan allowed it to develop its own special characteristics without intense influences from chinese giants and mongols evident in mainland cultures. Therefore, all the foreign elements are placed in the matrix styles that are characterized as Japanese. A feature of Japanese music is called the chamber music sound ideal. No matter

how big an ensemble is, one finds that various instruments are set in a way that the tone color of each can be heard. This is understood through the relation to Western chamber music and orchestral sound ideal. Western orchestras primary intention is to merge all instrumental sounds into one glorious color. The color separation of Japanese music is quite evident in large court ensembles as well as drama music and literal chamber ensembles. Such textures support the multi linear orientation of Japanese music. One of the most important cultural differences in Japan is gender. Japan was an equitable matriarchal society until Confucian ideas immigrated from China. These ideas defined Japanese culture until the end of World War II. The integration of Confucian structures where men dominate shifted gender roles into a patriarchal system. Both men and women shared the same expectations under this system: loyalty and courage. Men were expected to be loyal to their lords while women were to be loyal to their husbands and family. Surprisingly, women could own and inherit property in feudal Japan. They were expected to control house budget and household decisions in support of their husband's serving their lord. World War II shifted the thinking of gender roles. The war sharply divided gender roles, much to the detriment of women. Women's primary duty was to have children. Magazines portrayed the women as perfect housewives, although they worked in munition factories. Women who stayed home, unlike their husbands, were expected to be chaste. They sent their men 'comfort dolls' which were dolls made from cloth and buttons. Men were forced to fight under samurai ideals to the point of suicide. These ideas took the thought of brotherly love and used them to make men fight to the point of suicide. The film, Letters from Iwa Jima, is a perfect illustration of these ideals. Post WWII abruptly altered the gender roles of Japan. American attitudes about public affection, fashion and values changed ideals of men and women toward traditional roles. Modern Japanese gender roles took a mix of American views and traditional beliefs during this time. Modern Japanese gender roles revolve around their vertical society where someone's identity is a part of a group’s identity. This is why honorifics are a vital part of their language. They said in the definition of how a person belongs or relates to a group. Today, women still control the household and all decisions , allowing men to devote themselves to work. This is changing as more women are attaining careers. Both genders are also delaying marriage. The stigma of being single is fading for both genders. There are a few ideas of gender that persist (Yamaguchi, 2000). Men should work outside their home. Gender should be brought up differently. Women are more suited to household work and taking care of children than men. Full time housewives are valuable to society because of their family raising role. These persistent ideas have roots in feudal Japan. The other most important cultural difference is age. Japan has the highest median years ,41 years, and the longest life expectancy, 80 years, in the world. In the U.S. those numbers are 35 and 77. Thus by sheer numbers, older persons are more salient in social policies, common practices, and everyday discourse in Japan than in the U.S. With regard to living arrangements, older Americans are more likely to live alone than their Japanese counterparts. Over a decade ago, 31 percent of 65+ Americans lived alone compared to the 10 percent of Japanese adults. Conversely, 32 percent of 65+ Japanese adults lived with children or family while the counterpart for the U.S. is 15 percent. Such living arrangements increase the likelihood that Japanese elders, in comparison to the U.S., give and receive more instrumental, emotional, and economic social support, which will lead to a greater sense of well being. In addition, aging has more meaning in Japan. Japanese views of aging are rooted in Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist philosophical traditions that characterize aging as maturity. Old age is then understood as a valuable part of life, even a time of rebirth after a busy period of working (Kitayama, 2000) . With age, individuals are expected to gain a certain sense of understanding, including an accepting attitude towards death and the capacity to be an impartial contributor to interactions. The image of the older person as a Sen-nin (wise sage) is common in Japanese culture. Finally, the Confucian norm of filial piety, in which children need to honor

their parents, promotes the importance of respect and care of their elders (Hwang, 1999). Aging is also divided into more defined social roles and age graded tasks than America. Many Japanese women participate in age specific groups that are organized and assisted by their government (Libra, 1984). Special celebrations mark a person's 60th birthday(the completion of a life calendar cycle) as well as the 77th, 88th,and 99th birthdays. Japan also celebrates a Revere the Elder day on which the city mayor gives money to all elders over the age of 80. Age specific terminology is used to address elders. This complex of linguistic and social practices contribute to the acceptance and respect of old age (Lebra, 1984). The overall portrayal of older persons in Japan must be tempered with awareness of changing views for elder respect. East Asian countries more specifically. where trends toward more reciprocal patterns of mutual respect between generations is evident (Ikels, 2004).

Conflict Management Style

Japan and America frequently use a different basis of moral reasoning when confronting problems (Iwasa, 2001). Isawa’s research highlights the fact that Americans commonly see a dichotomy of one choice or another, while Japan sees gradation within open options. As Black and Mendenhall (1993) note, within conflict management environments, the efforts to resolve issues between Japan and Americans are most commonly the greatest source of conflict. Japan is classified as a high-context culture that adjusts language based on the circumstance. While they intend to focus on the issue at hand, they don’t speak literally and leave the conversation for them to analyze by themselves. In Japanese culture, their high-context communication skills add to their other communication preferences, often clashing because of their differences. It is difficult for many non-english speaking monolinguistic to understand the distinctions from the subtle changes to language expressions provided. Taking this into account, Japanese culture has taken on an avoidance style conflict management preference. Avoidance is ignoring the main dilemma and adjusting the focus on something else. Takie Lebra from the book, Conflict in Japan, came to the conclusion that there are seven main non confrontational strategies present in Japanese interpersonal conflict. Out of all seven, there is one strategy that exemplifies avoidance perfectly. This strategy is called anticipatory management which is managing conflict in a preventative manner. This style requires awareness and foresight. Stopping themselves from confronting their problems, they cause problems for themselves which is one of the main factors in stress. Many Japanese citizens attain high stress levels from unsettled business and the uncertainty of what will come from their previous conversations. Nearly 40 percent of all young, unmarried Japanese adults have stress due to their high-context culture. This is where their high-context culture clashes with their confrontational problems. Under their need for harmony, they don’t help each other understand what they really mean. They give hints and present certain body language, expecting the opposite converser to understand what they are saying. What is unique about Japan is the elaborate lengths to which the Japanese will go to avoid discomfort. Even if their dilemma is of the utmost importance, they will still find a way to avoid it purely from the fact that they don’t want to cause further problems. For example, a woman being set up for an arranged marriage with someone she has not taken a liking to might make herself as undesirable as possible so that the opposite family might stop themselves from asking her. Another part of the avoidance conflict management style is anticipatory management. Anticipatory management is about much more than the skill of avoiding conflict. It is accomplished at a cost to the person employing a strategy. A husband might work more hours than normal to escape the inevitable confrontation with his wife, a wife might take on fewer responsibilities with her own children just to avoid her mother in law, and an intelligent

student not answering a question as to avoid her classmates being made into idiots are all examples of self sacrifice. Avoidance has become one of the most evidence management styles considering conflict in Japan. Their high-context culture is seamlessly mended into their conflict management choices. Japan holds a lot of meaning to their words, but contradicts themselves by avoiding conflict. Their avoidance tendencies drives their culture to maintain “harmony” or what they believe to be harmony. Their evasion of problems often works against them because it leads to unsolved dilemmas and passive aggressiveness. One similarity within this style is how both genders look to avoidance to solving their problems. Though both genders have unique communication styles, they will both have a similar idea to avoid their issues, thinking this will show the other person that they care, when in reality, they both cause each other to think they’re not as appreciated, cared about, or listened to. These differences affiliate with the genderlect theory.

Analysis of Theory

The Genderlect theory is the suggestion that women and men speak different speaking dialects or genderlects. For example, women communicate to build relationships and men communicate to one up each other. The theories goal is to come to mutual understanding and respect for the opposite sex and to appreciate and acknowledge their language. According to an informational blog on the genderlect theory, “This theory mostly focuses on how the two genders, male and female, are made of different things and how both genders has contrasting styles, in terms of the way they communicate.” It explains how the the norms behavior is different in each and different culture. Deborah Tanner, the person behind the genderlect theory, believes that in cross-culture is the best way to describe the communication between the two genders.Women talk to make meaningful connections and men talk to gain status. Us four, as a group, have chosen the genderlect theory to be paired with the Japanese culture because when we look into the history of Japan, we realized how strict their society is with gender and the standards they have for both men and women. Although Japan has evolved a bit, they still believe that men and women should be seen and presented to others as refined and civilized. In Japan, men tend to be more independent and are the heads of their households while women depend on their men to bring in income and take care of the house and children, if any. Back then, Japanese women were expected to be lady-like, pollite, and have lots of manners while men were often thought to be masculine, business men. Although Japan isn’t as strict with expectations as before, both men and women still are held up to a very high standard. The genderlect theory allows us to see the complex Japanese culture and it also gives us on how they treat females and males differently. With this information we can conclude how they treat women and what jobs they are most likely go get as well as men. In Japan, it has been noted how male and females were completely different, men had their own sets of regulations to follow and women had thier’s, until recently, many steps have been taken to lessen the boundaries of men and women stereotypes. Men now do women’s jobs and Women do men's jobs. Thus it is more acceptable for “a stay home dad” and “working mom.” Even with their evolution, traditions has still held on, further proving their connection to the genderlect theory.

Conclusion

Overall, the Japanese culture is passed down from generation to generation with very few modifications on overall product. Around a millenium, the male and female had extremist views on how males should be the higher gender. Rich men and families had many concubines

(spouses), and women were expected to be used to give birth only . Then hundreds of years later roles were less extreme. Women had more liberty, however they were still expected to marry. Men now could only have one wife. However, men were still expected to get jobs and women were still expected to get married and have babies. Japanese culture has progressed into something that cannot be captured by words, but by music, food, traditions, and values. Their culture, although much different than ours, provides a certain lifestyle that, as Americans, we would not be comfortable in. Their traditions and values derive from their history and how their ancestors viewed the world and the people around them. To us, it seems so different and unnatural, but to them, its life and death, pain and happiness, necessity and wanting, its purely home. The refined culture they have created has brought alive thousands of traditions and values that have shaped Japan into what it is today and what it will be known as for generations to come. Going into this speech, Japan was not a valuable choice merely because of our lack of knowledge of other cultures and countries besides our own. Our group represents 63% of Americans today who have not stepped foot out of the country and have yet to learn about other cultures and their beauty within. This number , though big, is not surprising as other people feel a sense of uncomfortability when it comes to new information. Since they are not accustomed to the culture and traditions, they don’t feel as if they belong. This also ties into Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The love and belonging tier talks about needing to feel a connection. This tier doesn’t just talk about connections with people; it also speaks about connecting with a certain group. Since Japan’s culture has been created over 100,000 years ago, it's not easy to walk in and immediately feel welcome and included. Today, we’ve talked about Japan’s culture, their conflict management styles, and how the genderlect theory coincides with their culture. It’s important to learn about new cultures and to intake the lessons and values they have adopted. Japan may be 6,804 miles away, but if we take part in their culture and learn to accept it, they could end up being closer than we believe.