

# Cultural Basics

Understanding World Cultures  
Osher course, January 2021  
John Hooker, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

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# Travel plan

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# What is culture?

- Popular view:
  - Culture is about food, language, dress, customs, holidays.



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# What is culture?

- What if all Chinese ate *Sauerbraten* and *Käsespätzle*
  - ...rather than *jiǎo zi* and *bāo zi*?




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# What is culture?

- It would be the same culture!



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# What is culture?

- Culture is the **thought system we live in.**
  - Culture determines our deepest assumptions, most of which we are not even aware of.
    - Like an iceberg, culture lies mostly beneath the surface.



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## What is culture?


- ✦ Culture vs. personality
  - ☒ Culture is not about personalities or "national character."
    - It doesn't "stereotype" individuals.
    - Every culture has the **full range** of personalities.
    - Culture is **learned**.
    - Personality is genetics + learning.
    - Culture is the **system** in which personalities exist.
    - Individuals may or may not fit in the system
  - ☒ Culture: personality as climate: weather



It can get hot in Alaska. Anchorage record = 90 deg F


## Just to clarify...

- ✦ This course makes no **judgments** about cultures.
  - ☒ It only tries to **understand** them.
    - This is already the task of a lifetime, or more.




## Intellectual background

- ☒ Many of the ideas presented here are based on the work of **Edward T. Hall** and **Geert Hofstede**



Edward T. Hall  
1914-2009




Geert Hofstede  
1928-2020

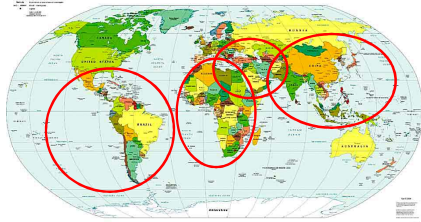
## Relationships vs. Rules

## Two types of cultures

- ✦ There are 5000+ cultures in the world, all very different.
- ✦ But they can be classified roughly as:
  - ☒ **relationship-based**
  - ☒ **rule-based**.
- ✦ Note color code:
  - ☒ **Red vs blue**



- ✦ **Relationship-based** = life is organized primarily around **personal relationships**.
  - ☒ **Africa, Asia, Middle East, South America**




☛ **Rule-based** = life is organized primarily by **rules**.  
 ☛ Australia, Europe, North America



Political Map of the World, April 2008

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☛ No culture is purely **rule-based** or **relationship-based**.  
 ☛ Nonetheless, one system tends to dominate.



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☛ Getting things done  
 ☛ Work through **personal connections**  
 ☛ Go by the **book**

☛ Business  
 ☛ It's all about forming a **relationship**.  
 ☛ Trust the **person**, not the system.  
 ☛ It's all about making **deals**.  
 ☛ Rely on the **system** to enforce the deal.

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☛ Traffic  
 ☛ **Negotiate** your way through it.  
 ☛ Follow traffic **laws**.




Intersection in Varanasi, India

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☛ Dealing with **stress**  
 ☛ Rely on family & friends for **support**.  
 ☛ Rely on the **system** and **oneself**

- Medical technology, social services, psychiatry
- Individual responsibility (even for illness)



Filipino family


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☛ Concept of **self**.  
 ☛ I am part of a larger unit (**collectivism**)
 

- Family, village, company, nation
- We responsible for each other.

 ☛ I am an autonomous individual (**individualism**)
 


- I am responsible for myself.



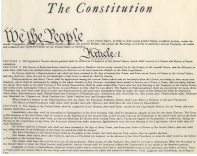
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**Concept of authority.**


- Authority rests in the **person**.
- Authority derives from **rules**.



Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques  
King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud



Supreme Law of the Land  
U.S. Constitution



Mohammed bin Salman

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### Implication for ethics

**Source of authority.**

- Because we are a **collective**, someone must have authority to coordinate us.
  - We **must respect** parents, grandparents, ancestors, boss, ruler.
  - Or society will break down.
- Because we are autonomous **individuals**, no one has inherent authority over another.
  - We **must respect** the **rules**.
  - The rules must be inherently **logical** and reasonable, because only logic and reason are **universal**.

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### Implication for ethics

- Relationship-based ethics**
  - Care and respect.**
  - Ethics flows from the necessity of maintaining relationships.
    - We must care for family, friends.
- Rule-based ethics**
  - Equality and fairness**
  - Ethics is based on rules we can agree upon as reasonable.
    - We must reach **rational consensus**.

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Many cultural traits **correlate** with the rule-based, relationship-based distinction.

Relationship-Based	Rule-Based
Polychronic	Monochronic
High power distance*	Low power distance*
Shame-based	Guilt-based
High context	Low context
Collectivist*	Individualist*
Masculine*	Feminine*
Uncertainty tolerant*	Uncertainty avoiding*
Dionysian	Apollonian

\*Hofstede's categories

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### Cultural Classification

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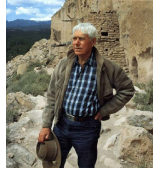
\*Hofstede's categories

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### Monochronic and polychronic

A culture's sense of **time** affects every aspect of daily life.

- Edward Hall classified cultures as **monochronic** and **polychronic**.

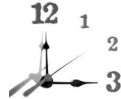



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## Monochronic and polychronic

### ❖ Monochronic cultures – one thing at a time.

- ❖ People like to **finish one task before moving to another** and are generally **punctual**.
- ❖ **Rule-based** cultures are monochronic.
  - **U.S.** is strongly monochronic.
  - Japan, Singapore and (to some extent) China are **punctual** but **polychronic**.



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## Monochronic and polychronic

### ❖ Polychronic cultures– juggling tasks.

- ❖ People are comfortable with being involved in **several tasks at once**.
- ❖ **Relationship-based** cultures are polychronic.
  - Punctuality generally **not important**.
  - Except in Japan, Singapore and (to some extent) China.



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## Monochronic cultures

### ❖ People **organize** and **structure** time.

- ❖ Time is partitioned into **intervals**, each devoted to one task.
- ❖ **Appointments** are made and **punctuality** important.
- ❖ Orderly **queues** form.



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## Monochronic cultures

### ❖ Time is a **measurable substance**.

- ❖ It can be spent, saved, wasted.
- ❖ Idleness **wastes time**.
- ❖ Activity **fills time**.
- ❖ Having to wait is **boring**.



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## Monochronic cultures

### ❖ Travel arrangements.

- ❖ Made **far in advance**.
- ❖ E.g., Scandinavia

### ❖ Deadlines.

- ❖ **Time is money**.
- ❖ People get **nervous** and **speed up** as the deadline approaches.



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## Polychronic cultures

### ❖ People work on **several tasks at once**.



- ❖ You may be **kept waiting** 45 minutes for an appointment.
- ❖ But don't keep the **boss** waiting!
- ❖ Clerk may serve **3 or 4** people at once.
- ❖ No orderly queues, except at international airports, hotels, etc.



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## Polychronic cultures


- Time is **not measured**.
  - Idleness **stops time**.
  - Activity **makes time**.
  - Having to wait is **no big deal**.

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## Polychronic cultures

- Travel arrangements.
  - Made at the **last minute**.
  - E.g., India.
- Deadlines.
  - People switch to another task when delayed.
  - No one speeds up as the deadline approaches.



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## Stress management

- Rule-based cultures **structure their environment**.
  - As a **stress management** mechanism.
  - Monochronic** time consciousness is a special case of this.
  - Structured time gives a sense of **predictability** and **control**.
    - Used in **day care** to calm children down.
    - Can be used **at home** now!
- Relationship-based cultures **don't need this**.
  - Family/friend **support** and **authority** figures provide sense of predictability and control.
  - So time consciousness remains **polychronic**.

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\*Hofstede's categories

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## Power distance

- Power distance** is the degree to which less powerful people **accept** their subordinate position.
  - Fundamental problem: how do people get power?
  - At some point, others must **grant** them power.



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- Relationship-based countries tend to be **high power distance**.
  - Behavior is regulated by **people with authority**.
  - Rules are legitimated and enforced by authority figures.
  - Leaders are expected to be wise and caring.
  - Example: Deng Xiaoping




Deng Xiaoping  
De facto leader of China  
1978-1992

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- ♦ Rule-based countries tend to be **low** power distance.
  - ☒ People respect the **rules** more than superiors.
  - ☒ Example: Sweden.




Karl XVI Gustaf  
Swedish King since 1973

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- ♦ High power distance:
  - ☒ Children **obey** and **respect** parents, teachers.
  - ☒ Employees are **reluctant to challenge** the boss or discuss problems.
  - ☒ Ideal boss is **benevolent** but **authoritarian**.
  - ☒ Possibly large **differences** in salary/skills.
  - ☒ Possibly **class** differences, limited upward mobility.
  - ☒ Because authority must reside in the **person**, certain individuals have authority based on who they are.


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- ♦ Low power distance:
  - ☒ Children are allowed to **contradict** their parents.
  - ☒ **Two-way** discussion in classroom.
  - ☒ **Discipline** may be a problem; parents side with child rather than teacher.
  - ☒ **No** corporal punishment.
  - ☒ Less need for certain individuals to have authority based solely on who they are (with exceptions, e.g. parents to some extent)




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- ♦ Low power distance:
  - ☒ **Consultative** management.
  - ☒ Employees bring **concerns** and grievances to the boss.
  - ☒ Ideal boss **inspires** workers.
  - ☒ Possibly smaller salary differences; workers may resent executive perks.
    - Scandinavia & U.S. (salary & offices)



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### Shame and guilt

- ♦ **Shame** and **guilt** are mechanisms for enforcing behavior norms.




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## Shame and guilt

- ✦ **Relationship-based** cultures enforce behavior norms by **shame**.
  - ❑ Loss of face.
  - ❑ Humiliation.
  - ❑ Punishment on the spot.
  - ❑ Direct and constant supervision.

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## Shame and guilt

- ✦ Key point for shame-based cultures:
  - ❑ Failure to supervise **gives permission** to break the "rules."
    - Public transit.
    - Exam cheating.
    - Government regulation.



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- ✦ **Guilt** is more important in **rule-based** cultures.
  - ❑ Guilt encourages obedience to rules **without supervision**.
  - ❑ But it may be a poor motivator and carry high psychological cost.
    - *Ein gutes Gewissen ist ein sanftes Ruhelkissen.*
  - ❑ Guilt is **reinforced** by fear of punishment.
  - ❑ Support for **monochronic** time consciousness.
  - ❑ Contrast with punctuality in Japan.



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- ✦ **Humor...**
  - ❑ Based on **jokes and irony** in guilt-based cultures.
    - Relief from rules, logic
  - ❑ Based on **amusement** in shame-based cultures.
    - Diversion from daily routine.



Mr. Bean breaking the rules

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## High and low context

- ✦ In **low-context** cultures,
  - ❑ There are many **signs, timetables, maps**.
  - ❑ **Contracts** are written, long, and detailed.
    - Fixed once signed.
    - Disputes resolved by lawsuits.
  - ❑ People expect the rules to be in writing.
  - ❑ People **pay attention to written rules**.
    - Example: restroom sign.



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## High and low context

- ✦ In **high-context** cultures,
  - ☒ People already know what to do.
  - ☒ **Contracts** are vague, verbal, or nonexistent.
    - Except in "low uncertainty tolerance" cultures, e.g. Latin America.
    - Agreements evolve with the situation.
    - Legal system weak.
    - Disputes resolved by negotiation.
  - ☒ People **may not pay attention to written rules.**

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## High and low context

- ✦ In **low-context** cultures,
  - ☒ Disagreements are resolved by **open discussion**.
  - ☒ It is OK to say "**no**".
  - ☒ You can **disagree** with company policy.



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## High and low context

- ✦ In **high-context** cultures,
  - ☒ Communication is **indirect**.
  - ☒ One rarely says "**no**," may say "yes" to be polite.
  - ☒ Don't **criticize company policy** in front of the boss.



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## High and low context

- ✦ Cultural adjustment
  - ☒ It is easier to adjust to a low-context culture.
  - ☒ The information you need is widely available.



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## Collectivist and individualist

- ✦ **Collectivist** cultures
  - ☒ Primary loyalty is to the **group**.
    - Usually the **family**, sometimes the village, company, or nation.
  - ☒ People rely on the **group** for support, security, predictability.



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## Collectivist and individualist

- ✦ **Individualist** cultures
  - ☒ Primary loyalty is to **oneself**.
    - People are held **individually responsible** for their own welfare.
    - People are expected to show **individual initiative**.
  - ☒ People rely on **themselves** and an impersonal **system** for support, security, predictability.



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## Masculine/feminine

- ✦ The distinction can be understood in two ways...



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## Masculine/feminine

- ✦ Attitude toward **masculine values**.
  - ☒ *Masculine*: Men are expected to be **tough**.
  - ☒ *Feminine*: Men & women more **similar**.
- ✦ Attitude toward **competition**.
  - ☒ *Masculine*: **competition** valued.
  - ☒ *Feminine*: **cooperation** valued.




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## Masculine values

		Masculine	Feminine
Competitiveness	Masculine	Japan USA, UK, Ireland Philippines India	
	Feminine	East African cultures Arab cultures Eastern Slavic cultures Machismo cultures	Scandinavia Western Slavic cultures Thailand

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### Thailand: A Feminine Culture?



Thai soldier during 2006 military coup



Nong Tum, well-known kathoey (portrayed in film *Beautiful Boxer*)



Military crackdown on protestors in Bangkok, May 2010

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### Uncertainty

Attitudes toward unpredictability in life...




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### Uncertainty

Uncertainty tolerant:

- Willing to take risks.
- Entrepreneurial in business.
- Comfortable with travel, relocation.




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### Uncertainty

Uncertainty avoiding:

- Prefer familiar surroundings.
- Risk-averse in business.
- Dysfunctional bureaucracy serves as ritual.




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### Uncertainty

Some uncertainty avoiding cultures:


- Greece.
- Latin America.
- Western Slavic cultures.
- Belgium.
- France.



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## Uncertainty

- Some uncertainty tolerant cultures:
  - U.K.
  - USA.
  - Hong Kong & coastal Chinese.
  - Singapore.



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## Uncertainty

- Case study: United Kingdom
  - Masculine culture
    - Militaristic
    - Stiff upper lip
    - Competitive
  - Uncertainty tolerant culture
    - Love to travel, resettle anywhere.
    - Former British colonies tend to be more livable than most, because the British lived there themselves.
    - Former colonies include U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong, Kenya, Zimbabwe.



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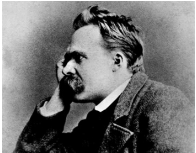
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## Dionysian/Apollonian


- Introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*.
  - To describe two sides of classical Greek culture.



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## Dionysian/Apollonian

- Anthropologist Ruth Benedict used the distinction to describe native American cultures.
  - Patterns of Culture* (1934).
  - Pueblo vs. plains Indians.
    - Pueblo: orderly lifestyle
    - Plains: extreme experience
  - Two ways of handling stress, uncertainty, joy, and grief.



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## Dionysian/Apollonian



Funeral, Norway  
Apollonian



Funeral, Palestine  
Dionysian

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## Hofstede's Classification

- The best known classification.
  - ▣ From Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010).
    - Based on a worldwide survey of employees of IBM subsidiaries in 50 countries.



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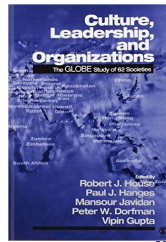
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    - Based on a worldwide survey of employees of IBM subsidiaries in 50 countries.
  - ▣ Often covered in executive workshops.
    - See as legitimate in the West due to its basis in quantifiable responses to surveys.



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## Hofstede's Classification

- ▣ More recent surveys in *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*.
  - These are summarized here, in case you are curious.
  - Hofstede's original classification seems more useful.



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Power Distance (Hofstede)

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern Europe	Other Western
Malaysia Philippines	Guatemala Panama Mexico Venezuela	Arab countries India West Africa	Yugoslavia	France
Indonesia Singapore Hong Kong	Ecuador Brazil Colombia El Salvador Paru	Turkey East Africa	Belgium Portugal Greece Spain Italy	
Thailand S. Korea Taiwan Japan	Chile Uruguay Argentina	Iran Pakistan S. Africa Jamaica		USA Canada Netherlands Australia W. Germany U.K. Switzerland Finland Norway Sweden Ireland New Zealand Denmark Austria
	Costa Rica			
		Israel		

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Collectivism (Hofstede)

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern Europe	Other Western
	Guatemala Ecuador Panama Venezuela Colombia Costa Rica Paru El Salvador	Pakistan	Portugal Yugoslavia Greece	Austria Finland W. Germany Switzerland Norway Ireland Sweden Denmark New Zealand Netherlands Canada U.K. Australia USA
Indonesia Taiwan S. Korea Thailand Singapore Hong Kong Malaysia Philippines	Chile	W. Africa	Spain	
	Mexico Uruguay Brazil	E. Africa Turkey Arab countries Jamaica Iran India Israel S. Africa	France Belgium Italy	
Japan	Argentina			

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Masculine/feminine (Hofstede)

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern Europe	Other Western
Japan	Venezuela Mexico	Jamaica	Italy	Austria Switzerland Ireland U.K. W. Germany USA Australia New Zealand Canada
Philippines	Colombia Ecuador	S. Africa	Greece Belgium	
Hong Kong Malaysia	Argentina	India Arab countries Pakistan Israel W. Africa Turkey Iran E. Africa	France Spain	
Singapore Indonesia	Brazil			
Taiwan	Panama			
S. Korea	Peru El Salvador Uruguay Guatemala Chile Costa Rica		Portugal Yugoslavia	Finland Denmark Netherlands Norway Sweden
Thailand				

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**Uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern Europe	Other Western
Japan	Guatemala Uruguay Peru Chile Costa Rica Panama Argentina Colombia Venezuela Brazil Ecuador	Turkey Israel	Greece Portugal Belgium Yugoslavia France Spain	Austria W. Germany Finland Switzerland Netherlands Australia Norway New Zealand Canada USA U.K. Ireland Sweden Denmark
S. Korea			Italy	
Taiwan Thailand		Pakistan Arab countries Iran W. Africa E. Africa		
Indonesia		S. Africa		
Philippines Malaysia Hong Kong Singapore		India Jamaica		

**Power Distance (GLOBE)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern & Eastern Europe	Other Western
Thailand S. Korea	El Salvador Argentina Guatemala Ecuador Colombia	Morocco Nigeria Zimbabwe Turkey India Russia Iran	E. Germany Hungary Spain	
Philippines	Venezuela Brazil Mexico	Zambia Kazakhstan Namibia Georgia	Portugal Italy Greece Slovenia	W. Germany
Taiwan Indonesia Malaysia Japan China Singapore Hong Kong		S. Africa (white) Kuwait Egypt	France Poland	England Ireland
	Costa Rica Bolivia	Qatar Israel S. Africa (black)	Albania	Austria Switzerland Sweden Canada Australia Netherlands Denmark

**In-group Collectivism (GLOBE)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern & Eastern Europe	Other Western
Philippines		Georgia Iran India Turkey Morocco Zambia Kuwait	Albania	
China Thailand Indonesia Singapore Taiwan S. Korea Malaysia	Ecuador Colombia Mexico Guatemala Argentina Bolivia El Salvador Costa Rica Brazil	Egypt Russia Zimbabwe Nigeria Kazakhstan S. Africa (black) Qatar Israel Namibia S. Africa (white)	Poland Portugal Spain Slovenia Greece Hungary Italy	Ireland Austria
Hong Kong			E. Germany France	
Japan				Canada USA Australia England Finland W. Germany Switzerland Netherlands New Zealand Sweden Denmark

**Male domination (GLOBE)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern & Eastern Europe	Other Western
S. Korea		Kuwait Egypt Morocco Zambia Turkey India Iran	Spain	Switzerland
China Taiwan Japan Indonesia Thailand Hong Kong Malaysia	Guatemala Ecuador El Salvador Brazil	Nigeria Zimbabwe Israel S. Africa (white)	E. Germany W. Germany Italy Greece	Austria Ireland New Zealand USA Australia Netherlands
Philippines Singapore	Argentina Bolivia Costa Rica Venezuela Mexico Colombia	Georgia Qatar S. Africa (black)	France Portugal Albania	England Canada Sweden Denmark
		Kazakhstan Namibia Russia	Slovenia Poland Hungary	

**Assertiveness (GLOBE)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern & Eastern Europe	Other Western
Hong Kong	El Salvador	Nigeria S. Africa (white)	E. Germany Greece	Austria W. Germany USA Switzerland
S. Korea	Mexico Venezuela Argentina Brazil	Turkey Morocco Kazakhstan S. Africa (black) Israel	Spain	Netherlands Australia
Singapore	Colombia Ecuador	Georgia Qatar Zambia Zimbabwe Iran Namibia Egypt	France Italy Poland Slovenia	England Canada Ireland
Philippines Taiwan Malaysia Indonesia China	Guatemala Bolivia Costa Rica		Portugal	Finland Denmark
Thailand Japan		India Russia Kuwait		New Zealand Sweden

**Performance oriented (GLOBE)**

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern & Eastern Europe	Other Western
Indonesia	Ecuador Colombia Brazil	Philippines Israel	E. Germany Spain	USA Canada Ireland England Australia New Zealand Austria
Singapore Malaysia	El Salvador Argentina Costa Rica Mexico Guatemala Venezuela Bolivia	Zimbabwe Namibia Zambia Kuwait	Italy Portugal Hungary	W. Germany Switzerland Denmark Finland
Thailand		S. Africa (white) Nigeria Kazakhstan India Georgia Russia Turkey Egypt		Sweden Netherlands
Hong Kong		Iran S. Africa (black) Morocco Qatar	Poland Greece Slovenia	
Japan Taiwan China S. Korea			Albania France	



Uncertainty avoidance - conceived as orderliness and/or high context and/or high power distance (GLOBE)

East Asia	Latin America	Other	Southern Europe	Other Western
Singapore				Switzerland Sweden Denmark W. Germany Austria Finland New Zealand Netherlands England Canada Australia Ireland
China Malaysia			E. Germany	
Taiwan Hong Kong		S. Africa (black)	Albania France	
Indonesia	Mexico	Nigeria Kuwait Namibia Zimbabwe India Zambia		USA
Japan		S. Africa (white) Egypt Israel Qatar		
Thailand Philippines	Costa Rica		Spain Portugal Italy Slovenia	
	Ecuador	Iran Kazakhstan		
	Argentina	Morocco		
	El Salvador	Turkey	Poland	
S. Korea	Brazil Colombia Venezuela Bolivia Guatemala	Georgia	Greece	
		Russia	Hungary	