

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Broad implications of culture
- Reasons cultural awareness is important for military intelligence linguists
- Cultural awareness advantages possessed by military personnel
- American and East Asian values expressed through proverbs
- Contrasting East Asian and American values
- Differing perceptions (American/East Asian) of time
- Steps to build cultural sensitivity
- Barriers to cultural understanding
 - Treatment plan for cultural shock

Identify

- Culture
- Peace Operations
- General Joseph W. Stilwell
- Proverbs
- Monochronic and polychronic time
- Creative generalizations
- Perceptions
 - Ethnocentrism, Prejudice, Stereotypes, Culture Shock

Realize

- Ease in making cultural misperceptions
- Continuous learning required for cultural awareness
- Cultural variety experienced in American society
- Interconnectedness of religion and culture
- Information glut as a barrier to understanding
- Manifestations of culture shock

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

"The new military needs soldiers [sailors, airmen, marines] who can deal with a diversity of peoples and cultures, who can tolerate ambiguity, take initiative, and ask questions."

-- Alvin and Heidi Toffler, War and Anti-War, p. 74.

General Joseph Stilwell found "our men 'knew how to deal only in the American way and when this failed to bring results they became confused and lost patience.'"

-- Barbara Tuchman, Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945.

"The central elements of any culture or civilization are language and religion..."

In coping with identity crisis, what counts for people are blood and belief, faith and family. People rally to those with similar ancestry, religion, language, values, and institutions and distance themselves from those with different ones."

-- Professor Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, pp. 59, 126.

"The rediscovery of the Vietnam War suggests that its most important legacy may be the lesson that unique historical, political, cultural, and social factors always impinge on the military."

--American Military History--The U.S. Army in Vietnam, p. 693.

I. Culture--What is it?

"The values, beliefs and attitudes influencing behavior and relationships within a given group."

(Richard Mead, International Management, p. 6.)

That which guides people in their thinking, acting and feeling. Language, values, customary behaviors; ideas, beliefs and patterns of thinking; these attributes describe social characteristics of a people.

This total way of life of a group--passed on from generation to generation--is the shared culture of that populace.

II. Why is Cultural Awareness Important for Military Linguists?

1. Peace Operations Historically, military strategists often viewed cultural factors on the battlefield as insignificant. Recent peace operations and combined United Nations/multinational ventures however, illustrate the importance of these considerations.

"Population distribution, ethnic backgrounds, languages, religious beliefs, and political loyalties of civilian personnel all emerge as significant components of successful intelligence collection."
(FM 100-23, Peace Operations, p. 46.)

2. Intelligence Including the cultural dimension enables a more complete intelligence picture. In a recent Parameters article, Dr. Paul Bellutowski, of the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, wrote...



"Understanding culture may help to answer important military and civil questions such as the will of the enemy to fight, the determination of resistance groups to persevere, or the willingness of

the populace to support insurgents or warlords."
(Parameters, Spring 96, p. 34.)

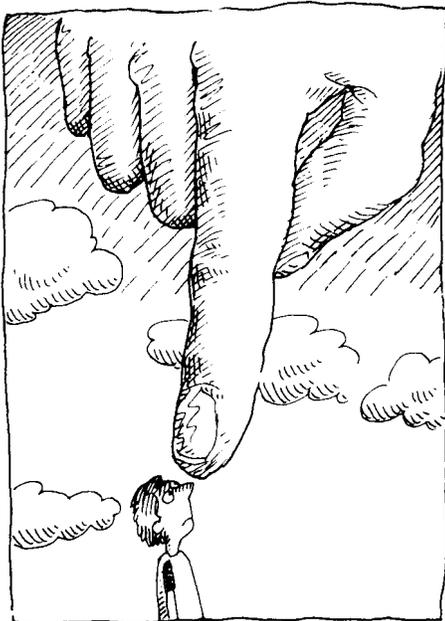
On the strategic level, this dimension influences directions of campaigns and coalition partnerships. On a tactical level, cultural awareness promotes fuller understanding of sources, and the worldviews from which intelligence data arises.

3. Allies Awareness of distinct practices and ways facilitates harmonious interaction with Allied counterparts.

When perceptions become rigid, negative attitudes (stereotypes) set in. Communication falters, animosities fester and suspicions arise.

Cultural awareness, on the other hand, of one's own and another's culture, enhances communication and facilitates positive interaction between peoples.

Guidance outlined for commanders in Field Manual 100-5, Operations, is instructive. Combined operations, involving military forces of two or more nations, display the need for cultural awareness by U.S. personnel.



"Differences in work ethic, standards of living, religion, and discipline affect the way nations approach war. Commanders cannot ignore these differences because they represent potential major problems."

Even seemingly minor differences, such as dietary restrictions or officer/soldier relationships, can have great impact. Commanders may have to accommodate religious holidays, prayer calls, and other unique

cultural traditions that are important to allies."
(FM 100-5, p. 5-2)

Desert Storm/Shield accentuated the need for cultural sensitivity. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's knowledge of Saudi Arabian ways enabled him to adjust to customs of the Arabian Peninsula.

Guidelines for U.S. Army staff included sensitivity to traditional practices, acceptance of the situation, and patience. Writes General Schwarzkopf, "I'm not known for being patient, but to do the job there [Saudi Arabia], that's just what I was. Decisions that would require fifteen minutes in Tampa or Washington would often consume three hours in Riyadh, as we sipped coffee, told stories and philosophized." (It Doesn't Take a Hero, p. 334.)

For Desert Storm/Shield/Farewell Chief of Logistics LTG Gus Pagonis, the total experience was one of continuous learning. Recognition of the importance of religion, non-verbal communication patterns, gender issues and nuances of gestures and taboos played a big role.

Displaying calmness and self-control in all settings became foremost.



"I am a blunt person, and I'm not known as a paragon of patience. But I soon learned that in the Middle East, you have to go slow to go fast. And so we did." (Moving Mountains, p. 107.)

4. Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) Flexibility

Linguists--whatever their specific MOS--must realize their language abilities cause them to be seen as subject matter experts by their command. Depending on the need or crisis at hand, linguists may be called upon to interpret, translate, or serve as cultural advisors to the command. These varying tasks may be assigned in addition to specific skills required of interrogators, voice intercept operators or analysts.

Former VII Corps (during Desert Storm) and Forces Command (FORSCOM) commander General Frederick M. Franks, Jr. wrote concerning the flexibility and adaptability required of today's military member.

"We will not have room for specialists. We must develop a team that plays both ways, a team that is scrappy and willing to perform many missions, a team that is versatile and agile." (FM 100-23, Peace Operations, p. 87.)

III. Cultural Awareness Advantages Possessed by Military Personnel

1. Diversity The United States military is the largest, most diverse organization in our nation. Ethnic, racial and regional diversity is built in to the force structure.



There is much variety in our country, even though a common culture centered in the Constitution binds all Americans together. Consider the differences displayed depending on whether one comes from an urban/rural, suburb/inner city setting.

Regional contrasts--from the Eastern establishment to the South, Southern California to the Mid West--make for distinct ways of looking at the

world. Ethnic backgrounds, whether Native American, Hispanic, African

American, Caucasian, Asian American--tend to influence one's overall perspective.

Responses to social/political issues also express this variety. Think of reactions to the following topics:

- The federal deficit
- Gun control
- Ordination of women
- Gays/lesbians in military
- Abortion
- Home schooling
- Women in combat
- Priests and marriage
 - Pay for professional athletes

With many of these topics, responses vary. Emotions simmer. Discussions often become so heated that rational dialogue leaves the picture. When we realize the volatile nature of disagreements to issues within our own land, then we can more readily empathize with differences expressed by individuals within other countries.

2. Basic Training



Basic training instills values which contribute to successful handling of new, culturally sensitive settings.

3. DLIFLC In the laboratory of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center classroom, we're privileged to observe manners, customs and folkways of instructors who come from many different countries and cultures.

4. Joint Operations The joint environment within our Armed Forces promotes respect and mannerliness which can easily be adapted to new settings.

5. Being American Living daily with the variety possessed by our own society constitutes a real cultural awareness advantage.



IV. Values

1. Values Expressed Through Proverbs Proverbs-- short, pithy sayings commonplace within a culture-- also describe basic values of a people. Customary sayings of Americans include:

- A penny saved is a penny earned.
- Time is money.
- Early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- God helps those who help themselves.
- No rest for the wicked.
- You've made your bed, now go sleep in it.
- The squeaky wheel gets the grease.
- A stitch in time saves nine.
- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone.
 - Never let them see you sweat.

Contrasting Chinese, Korean and Japanese proverbs, adapted from Kim Yong-Chol's Proverbs, East and West, consist of:

- One with a settled disposition will think even cabbage roots are fragrant.

- He who would stand up in the world must first learn to stoop.
- Forgetting evil and speaking only good helps to hold society together and preserve [humankind's] dignity with one another.
- Without old paintings in the hall, a family cannot be said to be established.
- All happiness in the world arises from a wish for the welfare of others; all misery arises from indulging the self.
- As the eagle's call echoes in the mountains, so a person's name continues after his death.
- Peace is happiness; merit is long life; contentment is wealth; and the obtaining of one's desires is honor.
- The husband will never banish from his household the wife who shared all the weal and woe with him.
- The riper the grain is, the lower it hangs its head.
 - The family that has an old person in it possesses a precious jewel.

- A wise student questions his or her own skill, not the examiner's competence.
- An egg should never argue with a rock.



- Never should we dare to injure the bodies that we have received from our parents.
- He who goes out of his house in search of happiness runs after a shadow.

2. American Values In his book entitled American Ways, author Gary Althen identifies the following common American values and assumptions.

- **Individualism and privacy**



Seeing ourselves as separate individuals, responsible for our own lives and destinies, is perhaps our most common characteristic as a people.

- **Equality** Overall, we have a deep faith in the fundamental way all people are equal, with no one born superior to anyone else.
- **Informality** Speech, dress, posture, and casualness all indicate the general unpretentious manner in which we approach life.
- **Future, change, progress** The future, rather than history and tradition, is our most pressing concern. Prospects for growth and development become primary considerations.
- **Goodness of humanity** We tend to see people as basically good.



The widespread emphasis on education, training, and self-improvement--where individuals through effort can better themselves--demonstrates this value.

- **Time**

We place efficiency, organization and disciplined use of time as a high priority. The "immediate instant," becomes the focus.

Because our *"daily life is among the fastest on earth...Time horizons are truncated..."* (Toffler, War and Anti-War, p. 248.)

- **Achievement, action, work, materialism** Someone who gets the job done is highly valued. Motivated achievers become valued associates. Successful, action oriented, on-the-go individuals who make something of themselves receive high regard.
- **Directness and assertiveness**

We practice a frank, open and direct way of communicating. Laying all the cards on the table and getting to the point speak to this straightforward manner practiced by many Americans.

3. Chinese Values In their book, Encountering the Chinese, We Wenzhong and Cornelius Grove identify the following fundamental values of Chinese culture which contrast with basic orientations of the United States. These values could apply to many of the cultures of East and Southeast Asian peoples.

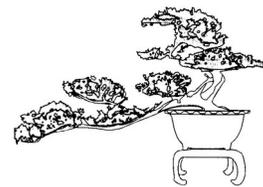
- **Collective**

Individuals subordinate their personal goals to those of the collective--the whole group of individuals together. The smallest unit of society is not the individual, rather the collective. Whether work unit, family, or village neighbors, the community is the most important social unit.

- **Large power distance** Chinese peoples tend to accept the fact that institutional and organizational power is unequally distributed in society. There is a comfortableness with the unequal distribution of power. Acceptance of traditional values of respect shown to age, seniority, rank, maleness, family background and government authority exhibit and reinforce this trait.

- **Harmony**

Intergroup harmony and avoidance of overt conflict in interpersonal relationships--especially with family members, close fiends and colleagues--is a matter of supreme concern.



- **Connections** A developed relationship, connection, obligation or sense of dependency (guanxi [gwahn-shyee]) is important. Obtaining supplies or gaining access to scarce goods and services is often accomplished through establishment of personal relationships. The American phrases "Who you know" and "You owe me one"

may indicate a partial implementation of the guanxi concept.

- **Face** The perception that others within your social group have of you denotes face. Asian cultures value face to a higher degree than many Americans. Qualities emphasized by specific Asian societies include: empathy (Japan), interpersonal sensitivity (Korea), dignity and consideration (Malaysia), consideration for others (Thailand), social acceptance (Philippines), and good moral character/achieved reputation (Chinese).
- **Filial piety**



Hsiao (sheeou--filial piety) describes the honor and reverence children show to both living and dead parents. The concept also indicates how elders have a responsibility to produce sons to carry on their lineage.

Other values, in no particular order, include:

- Tolerance of others
- Moderation
- Patriotism
- Sense of cultural superiority
- Contentedness with one's position in life
- Industry
- Solidarity with others
- Sincerity
- Trustworthiness
- Humility
- Personal steadiness and stability
- Keeping oneself pure and disinterested
- Adaptability
- Close, intimate friendship
- Loyalty to superiors
- Self-cultivation
- Thrift
- Courtesy
- Observation of rites and social rituals
- Kindness
- Patience
- Having a sense of shame
- Having few desires
- Knowledge
- Noncompetitiveness
- Persistence
- Chastity in women

4. Perceptions of Time Another way to contrast Americans and many other peoples of the world is to analyze the patterns of time as described by Edward T. Hall in his book Understanding Cultural Differences. **Monochronic** (one thing at a time) tends to describe many Americans. **Polychronic** (involved with many things at once) people comprise most of the non-European countries of the world.

For many East and Southeast Asian peoples, there is a tendency not to be as preoccupied as Americans with efficient use of time.



Monochronic People:

- Do one thing at a time.
- Concentrate on the job.
- Take time commitments seriously (deadlines, schedules).
- Are committed to the job.
- Adhere religiously to plans.

Polychronic People:

- Do many things at once.
- Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions.
- Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible.
- Are committed to people and human relationships.
- Change plans often and easily.

- Are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy and consideration.
- Show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend.
- Emphasize promptness.
- Are accustomed to short-term relationships.
- Are more concerned with those to whom they are closely related than with privacy.
- Borrow and lend things often and easily.
- Base promptness on the relationship.
- Have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships.

V. Developing Cultural Sensitivity

How can we effectively build our own cultural sensitivities? Certainly abilities acquired throughout basic training help. The joint military service environment promotes sensitivity. Even observing language instructors can assist. Wholehearted dedication is necessary. But what attitudes promote positive interaction with those from another culture? Can we develop cultural awareness "templates" to enhance our intelligence-gathering capabilities?

1. Maintain Creativity When Using Generalizations Given the great diversity found in many of the world's regions and cultures, it is difficult to accurately make broad, conclusive statements about others. Cultures and peoples are multi-layered, complex entities. With care, we can discern commonalities and differences between cultures.

Put another way, *"In some ways, all people are alike. In some ways, groups of people resemble each other. In some ways, every person is unique"* (Althen, American Ways, p. xii.)

Richard Mead, in his work entitled International Management, describes the use of generalizations. Overgeneralizing leads easily to stereotypes and prejudices. Sweeping statements routinely introduce incorrect conclusions. Yet...



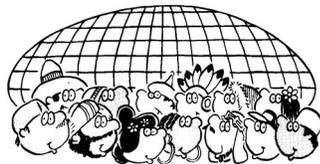
Creative generalizations, concepts tempered with care, refinement, always subject to modification and open to change--enable us to operate efficiently. When kept dynamic, flexible and tentative, this reasoning enables us to make intelligible statements about others.

2. Practice Civility Seeing other people as individuals like ourselves, whose way of life has meaning and continuity, promotes understanding.

Treating ideas, manners and customs with respect deepens our capacity to appreciate another's culture. Being civil--courteous, considerate and polite--opens doors for dialogue and discovery.

3. Realize the Interconnectedness of Religion and Culture Our American society respects the division between church and state. The Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion for all United States citizens. A spiritual/civil division often exists. Many other countries recognize no such differentiation.

In many areas of the world, politics, economics and government are not divorced from religious belief.



As a modernization process occurs across many parts of the globe, religion--rather than decreasing in importance--actually becomes a force for political

and societal renewal.

Religious persuasion runs deep. It permeates many societies. Our recognition of, and appreciation for, this intensity of religious expression enhances sensitivity to others.

4. Be Aware of Differing Perspectives. The following story, adapted from The Unborne Book of World Religions, illustrates the wide assortment of viewpoints which can be present (see p. 13).

A beast of mystery appeared in the land of the blind. The ruler sent his advisors out to investigate. Waiting until the mysterious beast was sleeping, the touched it.

The blind man touching the elephant's side said "It's like a wall."

The man touching the tusk reported, "It's like a spear."

"It's like a fan" (the ear).

"It's like a tree" (the leg).

"It's like a snake" (the trunk).

"It's like a rope" (the tail).

The blind men described parts of the same thing--a sleeping elephant. So different cultures can appear differently, depending on our perspective.

In some ways, we all are like the blind men and the elephant, limited by our own perspectives of a given culture or group of people and failing to see the variety of viewpoints present.

VI. Barriers to Cultural Understanding

Many obstacles check our full appreciation of other cultures/religions. The glut of information available--library circulations, Internet contacts, television newscasts and documentaries, newspapers and magazines--can overwhelm with their images and data. Uncomplicated, simple presentations fail to account for subtle, nuanced distinctions of interpretation and meaning.



Our own "spiritual blinders" may inhibit an objective, accurate appraisal of other religious/cultural systems.

Take a moment and consider the following terms. Ask yourself: What associations come to mind? Are the thoughts negative or positive? What difficulties arise when we categorize persons in such ways?

- Nerd
- Raghead
- Bubba
- Bimbo
- Charlie
- Commie
- Fundamentalist
 - Dirtbag

Perceptions--our mental grasp of others and their ideas of us--differ, especially in cross-cultural settings. Recognition of our own and others unique perceptions clarifies and deepens understanding.

Common notions of Americans held by many people in other countries include:

- Outgoing, friendly
- Loud, rude, boastful, immature
- Hardworking
- Ignorant of other countries
- Generous
- Wealthy
 - Always in a hurry