Feel the cultural differences

by Renee Bi

It doesn’t make sense to Asians why Americans always eat McDonald’s; also it’s awkward for Americans to learn how to use chopsticks. Culture doesn’t explain itself until you get to know it. That’s why so many stereotypes occur, such as Westerners think the Asians are good at math, Asians think the Westerners only eat junk food.

My name is Renee and I’m from the south part of China, Sichuan. I came to the U.S since 2010, and I was an exchange student to study in an American high school in Oregon. When I just landed here, I didn’t know anything about America. I just couldn’t open my mouth to talk to people until 3 month later. Because I was in a totally American High School, no Asians, no Chinese speakers, no helpers to help me understand what people mean. The only thing I can do is try to improve myself to fit into the American culture. I started try to talk to people, anyone, even though I couldn’t explain my thoughts well in English, sometimes I use body language instead. I talk to teachers let them help me with school and homework. I start make some American friends, actually they are really nice! They helped me almost everything that I didn’t understand. I start know how to play American games such as Apples to Apples, knows the way how they talk to each other, and I joint choir in my school. I start recognize that I’m not the only one have to learn new cultures, my American friends and family have the right to know other cultures too. So I shared my particular Chinese culture with them: I taught my host sisters how to use chopsticks, share with them how we celebrate our holidays such as the Spring Festival, made those spicy food from my city to let them try, even though they didn’t want to try at the first time because it was too spicy for them, but once they tried they really love it. That made me so happy!

I had really great experiences during the one year; I really enjoyed my new American life. And then I came to Seattle, come to Highline, made more friends that from others countries like Japan, Korea, Saudi Arab, Vietnam, Philippine… I like to learn about new cultures and I like to share my culture to those don’t know about it. Cultures don’t explain themselves, we have to spread them and let people know!
As a grown-up student studying overseas, you already have an established set of values, beliefs, and norms. Therefore, you easily have a hard time dealing with changes, getting used to a brand new culture, or even just taking a breath. This is known as “Culture Shock”. Most new students may find culture shock daunting, but as long as you promptly take action to get over it, instead of being passive and expecting it to disappear by itself, culture shock is nothing.

Learning or improving your English skills is always a crucial first step in making culture shock wear off. Overcoming the language barrier comes to be an essential factor in making you feel confident enough to mingle with the local people and be a part of their culture. One of the best ways to learn a new language is to watch the TV shows, dramas, or movies that are produced in a host country as that media reflects more aspects of its culture, and understanding the culture counts for learning the language because language is a product of culture.

Making a conscious effort to get involved in the culture is another great way to eradicate culture shock. You could experience the new culture even more deeply by interacting more with the local people and experiencing some traditional festivals of the host country, such as Thanksgiving. As long as you get to understand the culture better, culture shock will slip away because it only comes with the lack of understanding. You no longer need to waste a second to deal with problems caused by culture shock.

Moreover, you should think positively and regard culture shock as a challenge from which you have much to learn from. Having lived in your own culture for long, you should not miss any chance to broaden your horizons as you have only touched a hair of the world. And young adults should always stay curious about the world because the more you know, the more you realize you don’t know yet. Thus, you should always expect to stretch your limits by coping with changes, feel excited to jump out of the narrow, deep well, and turn to a new page of your life.

In addition, you should not hesitate to seek help when needed. It is understandable that you are having a hard time getting through problems caused by changes. But the situation will not get any better if you keep moving towards a dead end and crying on your bed all night. Nevertheless, you should bear in mind that you are not alone. You should find anyone you trust who has experienced culture shock to talk to, figuring out how they coped with the changes when they first came to the new environment. Also, you can approach counselors and teachers at Highline. Finding someone to talk to is always a good way to make you feel backed up while moving on in a new place.

All in all, I am convinced that you can breeze through culture shock as long as you can pick up the language, get yourself into a part of the culture, see culture shock as an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn, and realize there is an abundance of counselors and teachers to provide help. Although culture shock may sound and appear daunting or even horrible, it will make you become a more mature, resilient and independent individual.
Do you remember what you got for your first birthday present? In Korea, a child’s first birthday is very important. A long time ago, the death rate for children in Korea was extremely high. Many children died very young, not even surviving their first year of life. Those who lived to see their first birthday generally survived childhood. As a result, the first birthday marked a major milestone in a child’s life. The ceremony of the first birthday celebrates the child’s life with prayers for longevity and healthy.

On a first birthday in Korea, parents prepare lots of traditional Korean foods, such as rice cake, jap-chea and so on to share with the many neighbors and family members who come to cerebrate. Infants are dressed in hanboks to celebrate their 1st birthday, which is the traditional dress of South Korea. There is also a special event which is a little ceremony and fun tradition that can be adapted for each family. This ritual is carried out in order to predict the future for a youngster. Prior to the party, the parents pick 5-6 items that they will present to their child at the beginning of the party. These can include a number of various items that represent future lifestyles or careers. Each item has a different meaning that predicts the future, for example, the child who picks up money will be rich in the future. If the child picks up thread, that means he or she will live for a long time.

On my first birthday, there were threads, money, pencils, and hair pins. I picked up everything. I was supposed to pick just one thing, but I swept everything into my arms. My mom said she will never forget the face of people at the party because they all laughed and laughed. A long time ago, we used to have parties in the house. However, in these days, we normally have the party in a hotel or in some event company because it is much more convenient and the family doesn’t have to prepare a lot of things, such as food.
Malaysia is a multi-cultural society containing three different races: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Because everyone has their own belief and cultural background, in order for people to live peacefully and harmoniously in the same society, understanding, trust and tolerance is needed. Malays usually celebrate Hari Raya, meaning New Year. Their traditional food is Satay and Nasi Lemak, which means meat with spicy rice. The Indian’s New Year is Deepawali. Their traditional food is roti canai and banana leaf rice. The Chinese tend to accept and enjoy every food and all their delights. The Malay’s traditional costume is baju kurung for ladies, and their cultural belief is to have 5 different prayers in a day, Friday being their most important gathering in the mosque. The Chinese celebrate Chinese New Year in the beginning of the year and it usually falls between January and February. In Malaysia, some of the Chinese are not allowed to consume beef due to their different worshiping practices. For Indians, to eat beef is a big “no.” Malays are also strictly prohibited from eating pork. So if you are a business man in Malaysia, you will need to understand the customers’ preferences and their cultural beliefs in order to run a good business in a multi-race country.

Due to all these factors, Malaysia can be considered successful in handling the conflicts of different races through its understanding and valuing of various cultural norms and traditions. Besides these three races, the government in Malaysia needs to turn their attention toward the native tribes who live east of Malaysia, mostly in Sabah and Sarawak. They are usually considered a group of people that have been neglected by the government. There are other tribes in east Malaysia, such as Khadazan and Iban. Their cultural is to live and stay with many families in a long house.
Ho Chi Minh, who was born in May 19th, 1890, was a great Vietnamese Communist and revolutionary leader. He was struggling for the independence of my country, Vietnam. In 1945, he wrote and read the Declaration of Independence of the Vietnam Democratic Republic. He was one of the most famous people in the world. He could speak many languages such as French, Russian, Italian, and Chinese.

Ho Chi Minh was born in a poor but educated family. His mother had died when he was 5 and he made a living through manual labor. He loved going to school, but his path to learning was difficult. Some famous writers in my country at the time had admired his talent.

Since the war of aggression began, Ho Chi Minh went abroad to find a way to save the country. From 1911 to 1919, he had been in the United States and then in France. In 1923, he was in Muskvale. From 1924 to 1927, he left the Soviet Union to come to China. In 1930, he created the Communist Party of Vietnam. The purpose of his trip was to mobilize a communist stand against imperialist aggression. Until 1945, Ho Chi Minh was the one who gave birth to the country called Vietnam Democratic Republic. In 1947, until his death, he was the leader of a war that fought against French colonialism.

During his time serving for the resistance, he was a big contributor to Vietnamese literature. In addition, he was very good at music, film, art, theater, and especially poetry. His works play an important role in Vietnam. He was considered a national celebrity not only in Vietnam but also across the world. UNESCO has declared him a “Hero of national liberation and a great man of culture.”

In conclusion, I am very proud of him. Ho Chi Minh is a bright mirror for Vietnamese people and other people in the world. He spent his life not only for himself, but also for his country and his fellow Vietnamese. He was not arrogant since he was a president of Vietnam. I love the way he overcome obstacles in fighting for my country and how he has made our life better today.
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