Kingdom Culture as a Plumb Line in Cross-cultural Engagement

David Catterick
Briercrest College and Seminary

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt

Part of the Applied Linguistics Commons, Christianity Commons, Language and Literacy Education Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Kingdom Culture as a Plumb Line in Cross-cultural Engagement

David Catterick
Briercrest College and Seminary
Caronport, Saskatchewan, Canada

Abstract
This article seeks to add a faith-based perspective to existing intercultural communication theory. It explores the relationship between the theoretical construct of national culture commonly used by scholars in the field of intercultural communication and a construct that the author terms Kingdom culture. The article introduces Kingdom culture and explores the way it relates to national culture before suggesting that it serves as an effective plumb line by which national cultures including one's own can be measured. The article concludes with a worked example from a cultural context common in English language teaching in order to demonstrate the expanded spectrum of choices available to Christian English language teachers (CELTs) as a result of Kingdom culture. It is hoped that this article will provide CELTs a broader and deeper theoretical understanding with which to engage in the cultural incidents so common in the field of ELT.

Key words: culture, intercultural communication, English language teaching, national culture, Kingdom culture, critical incidents

Introduction

I was sitting in the living room of my apartment on the Chinese university campus where I was teaching thinking that it was probably about time to head to bed. Suddenly, I heard a loud knock on the front door. I was surprised as it was almost 10:00 pm and most visitors to my apartment tended to leave by nine o'clock. I opened the door and saw two male students standing in the dim porch light, one an older student I immediately recognized from one of my classes and the other I didn't. The one I didn't recognize immediately introduced himself as Zhang Wei[1], a friend of my student. Apologizing for the lateness of the visit, he asked if they might come in. As we walked into the living room, I noticed that the student from my class, Li Jun, was holding something flat wrapped in layers of newspaper. Zhang Wei told me that Li Jun was very worried about failing his final exam for my class later that week. I wasn't too surprised to hear that Li Jun felt nervous about passing the class because he hadn't completed his homework all semester and had received the lowest grade in the mid-term. When I visited the dorms in the evenings, I would typically find him playing cards while most of the other students from his class were studying.

---

[1] Student names have been changed.

Zhang Wei proceeded to tell me that Li Jun had brought a gift for me as a thank you for being his teacher that semester. As Li Jun carefully removed the layers of newspaper, Zhang Wei went on to explain that the object was a Tang dynasty bronze mirror that had been in Li Jun's family for centuries. As Li Jun stood up to bring the treasure to me, I realized I had very little time to formulate my response . . .

I am sure that many Christian English language teachers (CELTs) around the world know a Zhang Wei or a Li Jun and some may even be able to share stories of similar cultural challenges. We therefore need to consider the best course of action in the Bronze Mirror Incident. One route, of course, would be for me to acknowledge the value and beauty of the bronze mirror but find a way to carefully and sensitively express to Li Jun that the cultural norms of my home culture do not allow me as a teacher to accept a gift of such value or, indeed, a gift of any value before final grades are submitted. A second route would be for me to accept the bronze mirror recognizing that gift giving is common in the host culture and, at least in this case, is used to elicit from the recipient a commitment to a certain course of action. In accepting the gift, I would be participating in an established cultural practice that would oblige me to give Li Jun at least a passing mark in the final exam even if he performs poorly. Although these two routes would lead to very different outcomes, they are similar in one respect. They both invoke cultural norms, in the first the norms of the home culture, and in the second the norms of the host culture. But perhaps there is a third route, one that refers neither to home culture nor to host culture.

In this article I will suggest that just as there are national cultures with their various codes and values, so there is another culture that perhaps for obvious reasons has been ignored in the intercultural communication literature. I call this *Kingdom culture* and in this article I hope to explain what Kingdom culture is and demonstrate its role as a true point of reference, a plumb line (Amos 7:7-8) by which all cultural values and practices can be evaluated. I will end the article by showing how Kingdom culture creates a third route, one that can assist CELTs in situations like the Bronze Mirror Incident. I will begin, however, by exploring what we understand about culture including the five key characteristics of culture before examining Kingdom culture's relationship with national culture.

Considering Culture

Culture is all around us. CELTs see it in the social roles of the male and female students in their classes, in the non-verbal gestures their learners use each day, in cultural artefacts such as the art and architecture of the nation they live in, in food and celebrations, and even in attitudes to time. The sheer breadth of what comes under the banner of culture means that a standard or widely accepted definition of culture has never actually been agreed upon. A study by the American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn in the 1950s revealed no fewer than 164 definitions of culture (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952) and ongoing cultural research which has been led in recent decades by scholars in the fields of Business Management and Cross-cultural Psychology rather than by the anthropologists in the early post-war decades has given rise to even more definitions. One of the pioneers of cross-cultural psychology, Harry Triandis, points out that the different backgrounds of scholars in the field of intercultural communication has led to each scholar seeing culture from a different perspective. As a result, culture is seen by some scholars as a complex system of reinforcements, to others shared behaviors and shared cognitive systems or maps, while to yet others culture is shared symbolic systems or shared memories, (Triandis, 1996, p. 408). In the midst of such a broad spectrum of definitions and perspectives, I have chosen Triandis' own rather generic definition as the working definition of culture for this article:

> Culture consists of shared elements of subjective culture and behavioral patterns found among those who speak a particular language dialect, in a particular geographic region, during a specific historic period. (Triandis, 1994, cited in Triandis, 1996, p. 408)

There are few professions in which culture can be considered as important as language teaching not least because "language learning implies and embraces culture learning" (Damen, 1987, p. 4). Language teachers are therefore often encouraged to think of culture as a "fifth skill," an extension of the four main skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Damen, 1987, p. 4). There are actually multiple cultures in play in the language classroom including *home culture* (the potentially shared cultures of the learners), *host culture* (the wider national culture in which the instruction occurs), and *target culture* (the culture of the language being taught). One of the key pedagogical approaches connected with home culture has been to provide opportunities for learners to overcome their natural ethnocentric tendencies to critically engage with their own culture and to move towards some degree of intercultural competence (Liddicoat,

2004). Much of the host culture research has taken place in the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) focusing on the enculturation processes experienced by international student sojourners (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Far more research activity is connected with target culture with Peck (1988), for example, arguing that the approach to target culture needs to help language learners "feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language" by using posters, pictures, maps, and other realia that allow the learners to develop "a mental image" of the target culture (p. 3).

Five Laws of Culture

While the understanding of culture and the research interest is rather broad, scholars do broadly agree on the essential characteristics of culture. In my intercultural communication teaching I present these as the *five laws of culture* and these laws are used here to point to the fundamental differences between national culture and Kingdom culture.

The 1ˢᵗ Law of Culture: Culture is Situated

Culture is not abstract and can only be understood in the context of a specific geographical space and a given period of time. Culture is bound by space and that space can differ significantly in size corresponding to national borders, regional boundaries, ethnic lands, etc. Culture is also temporally bound in the sense that it is connected to a specific time period whether in the present, the historical past, or conceivably – at least in the case of science fiction – in the future. The fact that culture is firmly situated in the confines of space-time should not be surprising as humanity itself is similarly bound by space and time.

The 2ⁿᵈ Law of Culture: Culture is Learned

Culture is not genetic and is therefore not programmed at birth. Rather, culture is inculcated and socially transmitted because, fundamentally, humans are social beings. While some cultural learning is incidental, most cultural learning is planned though learning one's own culture does not typically occur in instructed settings. From a very early age a child is taught the difference between behavior that is socially acceptable and behavior that is not, and as the child grows, he or she learns to live by these learned behaviors. Statements such as "Look at me when I'm talking to you!" serve as verbal reinforcers of behavior, in the case of this expression the importance in predominantly low-context cultures of a child maintaining eye contact with the

parent or caregiver when communicating.

The 3ʳᵈ Law of Culture: Culture is **Shared**

Cultural in-groups tend to have a strong sense of their own identity typically expressed in the ways they perceive themselves to be different from other cultures. The comparison tends to be normative rather than neutral in that the group member sees their own culture as a *de facto* standard from which other cultures deviate. Cultures also come with their own codes of belonging. Even when the code is politically well-defined, as with national cultures, there can still be challenges to what constitutes the in-group. Membership of a national culture, for example, is typically determined according to whether someone is a passport holder of that country, but as CELTs working in the immigrant community can no doubt attest, even passport-holders might be considered outsiders by some members of the in-group if they happen to be recent immigrants or they have a relatively weak command of the national language.

The 4ᵗʰ Law of Culture: Culture is **Expressed**

Culture always finds expression. Culture is expressed in material ways as well as in more abstract ones. Material expression can be seen in edifices whose design features resonate with a nation's cultural values, in monuments to the memory of cultural heroes, and in the clothes that people wear and the rituals they engage in. Abstract expression is in the form of thought and language. One example is the way that family relationships are expressed in different languages. While a language such as English does not nuance an expression such as "my aunt," in more collectivist cultures that idea is represented by multiple terms each describing whether the aunt is on the maternal or paternal side, her age, her marital status, and her place in the birth order. Even grammatical forms such as pronouns can reveal cultural differences with people in more collectivist cultures being more likely to use the pronoun "we" rather than "I," a linguistic feature known as "nosism" (Hamamura & Xu, 2015).

The 5ᵗʰ Law of Culture: Culture is **Dynamic**

Culture is not static but is a dynamic system changing over time. Culture changes from generation to generation because when it is taught cross-generationally it is not passed down perfectly and the generation it is passed to is likely to be living in a somewhat different context because of developments in things such as transportation and technology. Cultural change also

happens when cultures come into contact with one another, something that is now more common in our increasingly globalized and interdependent world. While contact can lead to a variety of changes, one very noticeable one is that cultures are becoming increasingly similar as cultural traits in more dominant cultures overwrite the traits of the less dominant ones through direct means such as cultural hegemony or indirect ones such as what I like to call *cultural McDonaldization*, defined as the process by which national cultures are becoming more uniform.

National Culture Examined

The most extensively used level of culture in intercultural communication research is *national culture*. National culture can be thought of as the cultural characteristics common to the citizens of a sovereign nation. In this sense, it is possible to refer to "Canadian culture," "British culture" or the culture of any of the roughly 195 countries that exist in the world today. While national culture is the level of choice for intercultural research, the limitations of examining culture at this macro level are not difficult to see. Comparing North Korea and Canada serves as a good example; while North Korea's population has for the past 50 years been one of the most ethnically homogeneous in the world, Canada's citizens now self-identify with more than 120 ethnicities. The 2016 government census indicates that seven and a half million people – almost 22% of the Canadian population – are foreign-born. The political entity known as Canada is home to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis as well as to Chinese, Filipinos, and Indians (Statistics Canada, 2016). Much like most other countries in the Western world, Canada demonstrates why national culture, though convenient, may not be the best choice in cultural research because of ethnic or even regional diversity. The argument that ethnic diversity makes the use of national culture inappropriate has been strongly contested by scholars whose research is primarily at that level (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012).

Some of the earliest research connected with national cultures was undertaken at a time when anthropology still dominated the field of intercultural communication. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall is considered one of the grandfathers of intercultural communication and his (1959) book *The Silent Language* and his (1966) book *The Hidden Dimension* introduced the now familiar concepts of proxemics (social distance) and chronemics (views of time) which in turn encouraged further academic study in the then emerging field. Hall is perhaps most known for the concept of *high-context* cultures and *low-context* cultures which he introduced a decade

later in his book *Beyond Culture* (Hall, 1976). Low-context national cultures such as the United States of America value direct communication and explicit messaging via the verbal channel in order to minimize the risk of miscommunication. High-context cultures such as China are more comfortable with indirect communication and implicit messaging accessing a broader range of communication channels including gestures and the context in which the messaging happens.

Though Hall is credited with groundbreaking early research in the field of intercultural communication, the most influential and enduring national culture research has centered around the concept of *cultural dimensions* (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993). Cultural dimensions allow one national culture to be described in relation to others using specific value constructs. For examples, a dimension such as Individualism that is common to both Hofstede's and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's work allows for a national culture to be placed on a continuum that runs from Individualism to Collectivism/Communitarianism revealing the extent to which members of the national culture live their lives focused on their own needs and the needs of their immediate family or the needs and expectations of their extended family. A summary may be found in Figure 1. below. The cultural dimensions research uses self-reporting questionnaires administered to samples of the national populations (in the case of both Hofstede and Hampden-Turner the subjects were business managers of major multinational corporations) and their responses are used to situate the national culture along a continuum with the place reported – at least in the Hofstede research – by a numerical index.

Figure 1. *Two Sets of Cultural Dimensions*

Hofstede's 6-D Cultural Dimensions Hofstede (1980), Hofstede et al. (2010) (*Added after the original four cultural dimensions)	Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's 7 Cultural Dimensions (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993)
• Power Distance Index (PDI) • Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV) • Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) • Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) • Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation (LTO)* • Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR)*	• Universalism versus particularism • Individualism versus communitarianism • Specific versus diffuse • Neutral versus emotional • Achievement versus ascription • Sequential time versus synchronous time • Internal direction versus outer direction

The cultural dimensions research has proven to be a popular way of describing differences in national culture but it is important to understand that the insights such research provides serve only as a snapshot because, as we have already seen from the *five laws*, cultures change over time. This change is best described in the work of the World Values Survey, the largest international, time series investigation of human values ever undertaken and the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 64) which is based on that data.

When the *five laws of culture* are applied to national culture, it is easy to see how national culture is subject to all five laws, as noted with a ✓ in Figure 2. below.

Figure 2. *National Culture and the* Five Laws of Culture

National culture		
Law	✓ / ✗	Description
situated	✓	National cultures are *situated* in time and space. It is not possible to refer to a national culture without reference to the time period. The space boundary of a national culture is the country's accepted international borders though these can sometimes change and as a political construct may seem quite arbitrary.
learned	✓	National culture is passed down from one generation to the next. Cultural values are *learned* both informally and formally.
shared	✓	National culture is defined according to an in-group membership determined primarily by citizenship.
expressed	✓	National culture is *expressed* both materially and abstractly.
dynamic	✓	National culture changes over time as the nation undergoes changes in living context.

One final aspect to consider is the interrelationship of national cultures. The purpose of the cultural dimensions research is to compare rather than evaluate national cultures. The research does not, for example, promote the idea that a national culture that is individualistic is somehow superior to a culture that exhibits more collectivist tendencies. The belief that "the meaning, perceptions, behaviors, beliefs, values, actions, and organization of a group of people can be explained and understood only through that group's cultural lens" (Deane, 2015, p. 176) is popularly known as cultural relativism and is philosophically connected with a non-interventionist view of culture, the notion that one cultural group should not attempt to change the values of another however well-intentioned such an intervention may be. Although this concept now enjoys widespread social acceptance particularly in the Global North, there is

evidence that at least some issues transcend the principle of non-interference. Canada's recently published *Feminist International Assistance Policy* is an international engagement strategy whose goal is to "passionately defend the rights of women and girls so they can participate fully in society" (Global Affairs Canada, 2017, p. ii). That the cultural values of one national culture can be considered more civilized or enlightened than another's seems to harken back to earlier, colonialist views of culture and the practice raises significant questions about the authority that is being invoked in such instances.

Introducing Kingdom Culture

Perhaps not surprisingly, Kingdom culture is far more difficult to define than national culture. This is primarily due to the fact that unlike the specifically human aspects of national culture, Kingdom culture has a fundamentally spiritual point of reference. Kingdom culture may initially seem to be synonymous with the term *Christian culture*, but while there may seem to be some similarities between the two, Christian culture refers to a co-culture (sub-group) whose members have developed beliefs and/or behaviors that differ in marked ways from the wider, national culture. Due to denominational distinctives in both theology and worship it is actually perhaps more appropriate to use the term Christian culture in its plural form, acknowledging the presence of multiple Christian cultures in any given national culture. In contrast, Kingdom culture is fundamentally not a co-culture as it transcends not only the boundaries of individual Christian communities such as churches or denominations but also the more macro level national culture. Both the spiritual reference point and the fact that it transcends national culture means that we need to turn to scripture and theological texts for further insights into the nature and origins of Kingdom culture.

The idea of Kingdom (apart from its culture connection) has in fact received a great deal of scholarly attention not just because of the prevalence of the word Kingdom in the gospels – the Greek word for Kingdom *basileia* is used 126 times in the four gospels (Green, Brown, & Perrin, 2013) – but because Jesus taught more about Kingdom than almost any other topic. In the Gospel of Matthew alone, we learn that the Kingdom is *God's* (Matthew 6:10), *is coming* (Matthew 9:15), *is near us* (Matthew 4:17), *has come upon us* (Matthew 12:28), *needs to be entered* (Matthew 19:9), *is to be preached* (Matthew 26:13), *is designed to grow* (Matthew 13:31), *is not easy to comprehend* (Matthew 13:11), and yet *is simple enough for a child to*

understand (Matthew 18:2). Scripture therefore teaches that the Kingdom

> does not depend for its existence on human activity; humans do not create, build, construct, extend or render present the kingdom. The kingdom originates with God, it draws its character from God, and it precedes any human response to it, even though its presence invites (or demands) human response. (Green et al., 2013, p. 468)

Scripture also points to the fact that Kingdom can only be grasped by members of the in-group because understanding the Kingdom in anything more than an abstract, academic sense requires revelation from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14) and this revelation is given by God to those whose spirits have been made alive through Christ (Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 1:13).

When we apply the *five laws of culture* to Kingdom culture, we also see that it is subject to only one of the *five laws*, as evident in Figure 3. below.

Figure 3. *Kingdom Culture and the* Five Laws of Culture

Kingdom culture		
Law	✓ / ✗	Description
Situated	✗	Kingdom culture is *not situated* in time or space. Kingdom culture is both "now and not yet" (Ladd, 1996). Kingdom culture crosses the borders of national culture and exists in spiritual realms (Ephesians 6:12).
Learned	✗	Though Kingdom culture is taught (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Psalm 78:1-7; Proverbs 22:6; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:2), the primary transmission mode is revelation (Luke 10:21-22; Romans 8:9; Romans 8:26-27).
Shared	✓	Kingdom culture is *shared* in the sense that there is an in-group membership determined by rebirth (Colossians 1:13). Kingdom culture transcends national culture (Philippians 3:20). However, scripture cautions believers not to assume that they themselves can identify those who are members of the in-group (2 Timothy 2:19).
expressed	✗	Kingdom culture is *not expressed* materially. There are no edifices or monuments that represent Kingdom culture (though Christian culture can be represented in this way). Kingdom culture is *expressed* abstractly but in specific ways, evidenced by the agency of the Holy Spirit in the world (Luke 11:20) and in-group member behavior (1 John 3:18), and in language via the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14).
Dynamic	✗	Kingdom culture is not *dynamic* and does not change over time (though Christian culture changes). Kingdom culture is invariable.

That Kingdom culture so clearly does not follow the *five laws* outlined earlier should not be surprising. The laws are the key characteristics of cultures and, as we have seen, cultures are human both in origin and perpetuation. Kingdom culture's origins are spiritual in that it has been given by God to humanity rather than originating within humanity. Kingdom culture represents the way God intended for all humans to live regardless of when they live, their geographical location, their citizenship, etc. (Ephesians 1:9-10). Kingdom culture transcends national culture, coexisting rather than displacing or replacing it.

## Kingdom Culture's Relationship to National Culture

Before we explore the relationship between national culture and Kingdom culture in more detail, it would be helpful to consider a Christian perspective on national culture. The Lausanne Movement's origins can be traced back to July, 1974 when evangelist Billy Graham led a meeting of 2,700 participants from over 150 nations in Lausanne, Switzerland for "ten days of discussion, fellowship, worship and prayer. To this day the goal of the Lausanne Movement remains to connect church leaders and people of influence with the vision of "the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world" (Wright, 2011, p. 8). The Lausanne Covenant was published immediately following the inaugural meeting and as the blurb on the back cover of *The Lausanne Covenant: Complete Text and Study Guide* points out, it is now "widely regarded as one of the most significant documents in modern church history" (Stott, 2012). The Covenant eloquently sets out an evangelical Christian position of the relationship between national cultures while at the same time pointing to what I term Kingdom culture:

> Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. (Stott, 2012, p. 43)

The Covenant effectively overwrote the colonial-era view of culture in which culture was considered to be synonymous with civilization and cultural engagement, a fundamentally civilizing process. This earlier view of culture was influenced by the views of Social Darwinism and encouraged the evaluation of national cultures by the normative cultural standards of mostly Western Europe. The change to a non-hierarchical view of national culture laid out in the Lausanne Covenant was therefore in many ways groundbreaking. However, while the Covenant

may seem to take a non-evaluative stance when it comes to national culture, it does not actually dispense with the idea of evaluation. The fact that the Covenant "insists on moral absolutes in every culture" shows that while it denies any moral authority for evaluating one national culture by the standards of another, it nevertheless fully embraces the right to invoke a higher, moral authority which it terms "gospel" (Stott, 2012, p. 43). That the term gospel is synonymous with the term Kingdom culture is evident in the Gospel of Matthew where the two terms are juxtaposed in Jesus' command that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14, NIV). Earlier in the same gospel, Jesus suggests that those who have experienced the new birth have been given the authority to invoke Kingdom culture: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, NIV).

Plumb Line Image
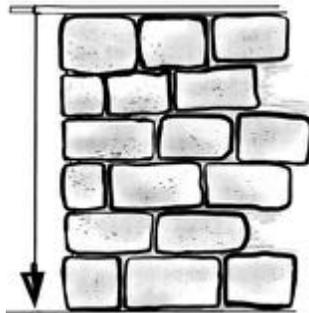
Applying Kingdom Culture

In his book *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*, Stott (1975) reconfirms the case for using Kingdom culture (the gospel) as a plumb line for national culture because it is "God's moral law" and is "absolute and invariable." He gives examples of the sort of things in a national culture that Kingdom culture would identify as being out of plumb, including "any idolatry which denies the uniqueness of God, any merit-system which denies the need of grace, and any oppression which denies the dignity of man" (para. 93). Stott and the other Covenant authors seem to see the role of the Church much as Geddert recently describes it:

- to live under God's kingly rule and to proclaim the good news that in Jesus, God's kingly rule has invaded this world
- to be a signpost and a foretaste of the ever-present reign of God that Jesus promised would one day come in fullness
- to live by kingdom priorities in the midst of worldly empires

- to be a transforming influence for God's justice and peace in this still fallen world, until Jesus comes to make all things new. (Geddert, 2019, p. 20)

These are rather lofty ideals so it might be difficult to imagine what invoking Kingdom culture looks like in a practical sense. To do so, we need to recognize that the language classroom is a shared cultural space, a Petri dish of interacting cultures and that CELTs who teach abroad are immersed in a host culture that at times contrasts sharply with the values of their home culture. As we have seen, the traditional intercultural literature promotes a descriptive, non-evaluative stance, one that encourages the sojourner to observe any cultural challenge through the lens of a cultural dimension. One approach to making a cultural idea practical involves the use of *critical incidents*. At its most basic, a critical incident is a "vividly remembered event which is unplanned and unanticipated" (Brookfield, 1990, p. 84, in Farrell, 2008, p. 3) and there is a long tradition of using critical incidents in cultural awareness training dating back to the 1960s (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994). A *cultural critical incident* is therefore an unanticipated event which reveals a variance in the way people from different cultural backgrounds might perceive or interpret the event. The following critical incident is one that I have adapted from an event in one of my EAP classes in the 1990s. The description and interpretation parts of the critical incident are both used here to demonstrate the way Kingdom culture theory translates into practice.

Critical Incident Description

Ji-hoon is an Asian student studying at a US university and attending English support classes at the university's Language Center. During the coffee breaks, Ji-hoon takes out a large sketch pad containing the stunning sketches and watercolors he is working on. The teacher commends him on his art skills and naturally assumes he is a student in the Art department of the university. The teacher is therefore surprised when she learns a few weeks later that Ji-hoon is an undergraduate student in the university's Accountancy program. During one of the coffee breaks, she asks him if he enjoys working with numbers and his face immediately betrays his lack of enthusiasm. When the teacher asks him why he is studying Accountancy rather than Art, she suspects that she already knows the answer. Ji-hoon tells her that under pressure from grandparents, aunts and uncles, his parents forbade him from studying Art and indicated that they wanted him to study Accountancy or Engineering instead. Although Ji-hoon tells her he has

always enjoyed art he confirmed that he decided to unquestionably follow the wishes of his extended family.

Critical Incident Interpretation

The cultural dimensions research referred to earlier may account for some of Ji-hoon's decision making. In national cultures that tend to be more collectivist, the desires of the individual are subservient to the will of the parents and the extended family. The reason for the family's desire for Ji-hoon to study Accountancy or Engineering may also be explained by this dimension because the role of the child in collectivist cultures is to take care of the parents in their old age and greater wealth would make the parents' lives in the future more comfortable. Their rejection of his wish to study Art may indicate their doubt that it would lead to a lucrative profession but it might also be explained by the Inglehart-Welzel Cultural Map which shows that some national cultures tend more to Survival Values than Self-Expression Values.

Of course, neither the description phase of the critical incident nor the interpretation phase provides guidance for the teacher in how she should respond to Ji-hoon but the intercultural literature suggests two possible responses. The first route is for the teacher to acknowledge an understanding of Ji-hoon's home culture and praise him for his self-sacrifice in choosing to honor the wishes of his extended family (though if Ji-hoon is from a Confucian Heritage Culture then his action would be expected rather than praised). A second route would be for the teacher to acknowledge the values of the US host culture and suggest to Ji-hoon that the behavior of his parents is controlling and that he should rethink his decision to follow his extended family's wishes. The two routes are, of course, not mutually exclusive in the sense that the teacher might incorporate elements of both routes into her response to Ji-hoon. What is clear from the intercultural literature, though, is that no matter which route the teacher takes her stance must be descriptive rather than evaluative and that critiquing Ji-hoon's decision with reference to the norms of her own individualistic host culture is not an option.

In practical terms, Kingdom culture allows the teacher to take an evaluative stance in what may be thought of as a third route. Here, the teacher might tell Ji-hoon that in the Bible, God commands His children to honor their father and mother and promises that it will go well with them if they do (Ephesians 6:2-3). However, the Bible also indicates that those who want to follow Jesus need to – at least by comparison – "hate" their father and mother and other

members of their family (Luke 14:25-27) knowing that "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37a, NIV). The evaluative stance taken here is not a critique of Ji-hoon's home culture any more than it is a critique of the host culture. It is based instead on the Kingdom culture concept that God's claim on a life is higher than a parent's claim. I am not suggesting that the third route would somehow be the correct one to take in this critical incident because a builder only occasionally uses a plumb line in home construction and, as I often say to my trainees, it is important that people speak from God as they are moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Nor am I suggesting that invoking Kingdom culture is only appropriate when speaking with believers. Quite the contrary, in fact. Even assuming that Ji-hoon is not a believer, at the very least invoking Kingdom culture elevates it to a level above both home and host culture and may even provide an opportunity for Ji-hoon to ask more about the culture he is not (yet) an insider of.

The Bronze Mirror Incident described and interpreted at the very beginning of this article now serves as a brief second example. In choosing not to accept the bronze mirror, I could reference Kingdom culture by explaining to Li Jun and his friend that my identity as a Christ follower transcends my cultural identity as a foreign teacher from Britain. I could explain to them both that the characteristics of God's Kingdom revealed in the Bible are ones such as love and truth and that while I want my love for my students to always be evidenced by my actions in ways they themselves can clearly see, God also calls me to be a truthteller. I could explain that Kingdom culture therefore does not allow me to give to the university authorities anything other than a truthful accounting of a student's performance because the authorities must always know that I stand with Truth. Thus in this situation I could not accept his generous gift.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to show the contribution that an understanding of Kingdom culture can make to the life and work of CELTs. Kingdom culture is valuable as a cultural plumb line, an immutable and enduring standard which God invites all of humanity to live by. It therefore serves as a unique and powerful evaluative resource removing any danger in cultural critical incidents that CELTs might represent the cultural values of their home culture as a standard they expect others to live by. More needs to be written on the principles governing the decision to apply Kingdom culture and the *modus operandi* of applying it. Such considerations

might include being a diligent student of scripture (2 Timothy 2:15), being practiced in listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit (John 10:27), and inviting the Holy Spirit to check our heart (Psalm 139:23) to ensure that the motivation to invoke Kingdom culture is sourced in love rather than – for example – frustration as we navigate the W-curve of cultural adjustment (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). However, these are things for a subsequent article. My final hope is that this article has succeeded in demonstrating that intercultural communication is significantly broader than the secular scholarly texts suggest and that Kingdom culture is a valuable resource for CELTs in the variety of cultural contexts in which they find themselves.

Acknowledgements

References

Brislin, R. W., & Yoshida T. (1994). *Intercultural communication training: An introduction*. Sage.

Damen, L. (1987). *Culture learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom*. Addison-Wesley.

Deane, B. R. (2015). Cultural relativism. In J. M. Bennett (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of intercultural competence* (pp. 175-176). Sage.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2008). Critical incidents in ELT initial teacher training. *ELT Journal*, *62*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm072

Geddert, T. (2019). The kingdom and the church: Exploring the relationship. *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum*, *48*(1), 13–21.

Global Affairs Canada. (2017). *Canada's feminist international assistance policy*. Global Affairs Canada. [Available: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng]

Green, J. B., Brown, J. K., & Perrin, N. (Eds.). (2013). *Dictionary of Jesus and the gospels* (2nd ed.). InterVarsity Press.

Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, *19*(3), 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1963.tb00447.x

Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. Doubleday.

Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. Doubleday.

Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Anchor Press.

Hamamura, T., & Xu, Y. (2015). Changes in Chinese culture as examined through changes in personal pronoun usage. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *46*(7), 903–941. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115592968

Hofstede, G. H. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.

Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw-Hill.

Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change and democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Kroeber, A. L., & Kluckhohn, C. (1952). Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions. *Papers. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University, 47*(1), viii, 223.

Ladd, G. E. (1996). *The presence of the future: The eschatology of biblical realism* (Reprint ed.). Eerdmans.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2004). Intercultural language teaching: Principles for practice. *New Zealand Language Teacher*, *30*, 17–24.

Minkov, M., & Hofstede, G.H. (2012). Is national culture a meaningful concept?: Cultural values delineate homogeneous national clusters of in-country regions. *Cross-Cultural Research*, *46*(2), 133–159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397111427262

Peck, D. (1988). *Teaching culture: Beyond language*. New Haven Teachers Institute.

Smith, R. A., & Khawaja, N. G. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *35*(6), 699–713. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.08.004

Statistics Canada (2017). *Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage*. Statistics Canada. [Available: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016016/98-200-x2016016-eng.pdf]

Stott, J. (1975). The Lausanne covenant: An exposition and commentary. *Lausanne Occasional Paper*, *3*. [Available: https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-3]

Stott, J. (2012). *The Lausanne covenant: Complete text with study guide*. Hendrickson. [Available: https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov]

Sullivan, C., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2015). The interplay of international students' acculturative stress, social support, and acculturation modes. *Journal of International Students*, *5*(1), 1–11.

Triandis, H. C. (1994). *Culture and social behavior*. McGraw-Hill.

Triandis, H. C. (1996). The psychological measurement of cultural syndromes. *American Psychologist*, *51*(4), 407–415. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.4.407

Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (1993). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding cultural diversity in business*. Economist Books.

Wright, C. (2011). *The Cape Town commitment: A confession of faith and a call to action*. Hendrickson.

David Catterick (dcatterick@briercrest.ca) is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Briercrest College and Seminary in Saskatchewan, Canada where he is program director for the BA Applied Linguistics: TESOL. His most recent research has focused on the application of employability skills to TESOL training, motivations of Christian TESOL trainees, and catalytic teaching approaches in English language teaching.