

## CULTURAL RESUME

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## **Cultural Resume**

The country I have chosen to study for my cultural resume is Vietnam. I chose this country because I have had the pleasure of knowing Tami Truong for the past year. She is originally from Vietnam but moved to Hong Kong for many years then on to Washington state. Now she resides in New York and invest in Real Estate with me in Atlanta. Immediately after I met her I realized that although she was a great person and I enjoyed doing business with her, I was more intrigued about where she was from and her culture. My study of Vietnam I have discovered some uniqueness about their customs, traditions, values and lifestyles. While grasping to understand these unique qualities of Vietnam, I have developed a sensitivity to the culture and should be able to communicate better culturally with Tami or any Vietnamese people. My goal in the paper is to lay out what I learned and developed from this study that will help the reader also be equipped to communicate and understand the Vietnam people and country better.

The customs of Vietnam ironically like those of the United States of America. The country is divided into two sections the North and South. One factions in the past was communist controlled and the other was controlled by the elected party of the people. The United States and other allies partnered with the people who wanted a free state in Vietnam and defeated the communist regime. Now Vietnam is under one rule and is no longer separated politically. Although the country seems to be one physically they are still divided mentally and traditionally. My perspective was enlightened when I observed how Tami esteems her father because he fought against the communist parity in the Vietnam army. When she went to Vietnam for the summer she called me on many occasions. There was one time she called me, and she was about to travel to an area of Vietnam that was once controlled by communist. I could hear

our conversation the reluctance by the way words she used. I asked her, and she told me that they don't like to travel there because it was once communist ruled, and it is also a popular tourist area. Although she added that it was a popular tourist area I know her real reason was because of her feelings about how that area was ruled when she was a child. I mentioned previously that Vietnam was like the United States in this manner because of the division of one country. Even now Tami's political views as an American Citizen are formed based on her experiences in Vietnam. She molded her American political views by believing liberals are the equivalent of the communist parties she remembers from Vietnam. These cultural and political memoirs pushed her to become a Republican because she says they remind her of the group of people that her father, the United States, and allied countries fought for.

The next thing that intrigued me about Vietnam was the sense of value they place on family. Vietnamese life is totally based on the appreciation of parents and those who came before them. Many families live in the same house to help each other experience the best life possible. Obtaining an education, working hard, and protecting the family name is the greatest honor in their culture. I listened through many conversations with Tami of the frustrations because she knows her mother will never come to the United States. This will never happen because of the choice her mother made to stay. However, I also see the value of Tami's commitment to her family when I see the photos of the mansion she built her family on the coast of Vietnam. Her mother shares this home with her other daughter and grandchildren that remains in Vietnam. Although she will never come to United States to live the American dream she is able to live the American dream in Vietnam because of the value of family. Now I understand when I read in Vietnam Culture<sup>1</sup> that Vietnamese life is profoundly influenced by ancestor worship. I see how Tami esteems her father how he was a great fighter and hero, and how she

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<sup>1</sup> Vietnam Culture – Article on Vietnamese Family Life, [www.vietnam-culture.com](http://www.vietnam-culture.com)

cares for her mother and other family members. She is living out what her heritage taught her at a very early age, that she owes everything to her parents and ancestors.

During this course I was admonished through an assignment to visit a restaurant that is of a different culture. Since I chose Vietnam for my cultural resume I visited a Vietnam restaurant on the south side of Atlanta in Forest Park Georgia. This restaurant is in the center of a Vietnamese community that is rapidly growing. This restaurant experience I believe gave me a wide-open view of the lifestyles of some of the Vietnamese people. When I was there observing the atmosphere, I began to build a rapport with my waiter. I found during our sporadic conversations that everyone employed there was family connected. They were not just culturally connected because they were from Vietnam but also blood connected. The young lady explained to me that once the owner came and became successful he began to send for other family members. They all come to the United States and began to work hard to help build the business. Then they will send for the next family to come and so as many of their family members as possible can experience the American dream. However, she says they work nonstop to help support themselves and those still in Vietnam waiting to come. This showed me the fabric of their values in the most transparent form. These values are what embellished the lifestyles of Vietnamese people.

Vietnamese are so family oriented that they rarely affiliate outside of their culture. Even those that have been Americanized tend to connect better with other Vietnamese people. They fellowship, eat, do business and barter best with each other as their first choice. They are intelligent people and will only break that pattern if business or emergency calls for it. This perspective on the culture could cause major communication issues when trying to deal with someone like me. I must admit my cross- culture relationship with Tami was a struggle at first.

The struggle arose because of the misunderstanding of our cultures. I experienced a self-disclosure issue with her until I actively began to engage her according to her cultural understanding. Since most of our communication was verbally I focused on the nature of the language she used first. I struggled with her dialect at first it was hard understanding what she was saying. I also struggled with just simply interpreting our conversation. Although she has been in the United States for a while she still has a strong Vietnamese influence in her language. I asked her to slow down and pronounce her words clearly, so I could get a better understanding. I found when I did this she opened and told me she was struggling with understanding me as well. I learned in the class that Asians feel rather than analyze or think about the topics of their communication. Therefore, so much of her culture comes through to our conversations. Asians are also abrupt when they are getting off course or off topic. Originally this would really make me angry. I felt like she was being rude and disrespectful. I learned from the Cultural Diversity-Tips for Communication with Cultural Awareness video that we must be patient with how other communicate in their culture. I have been so accustomed to dealing with Americans, I think I experienced culture shock when I began to deal with Tami. I was experiencing culture discomfort which is normal until you adjust to the new culture environment. I understand why the communication was so difficult because traditionally Vietnamese people communicate non-verbally. This non-verbal communication is often misinterpreted by others especially Americans. By American standards, a person acting or expressing themselves through non-verbal ways appear suspicious, unreliable, or mischievous. Vietnamese culture prefer non-verbal communication, but Americans like to express themselves through verbal expressions.

Understanding how to better communicate with someone from the Vietnamese culture will be impossible without looking at two other important factors of their culture. Those other two factors are religion and politics. I have already revealed how family, customs and traditions are a major influence on Vietnamese culture now I will attempt to show where religion and politics stand in their society. Vietnam has a plethora of religions that encompasses the region including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Cao Dia and Hao Hao priests. Vietnam is known for its ritualistic beliefs. The most important ritualistic event in their society is the celebration of the Lunar New Year. This is when families get together to welcoming the coming of the new year and pay homage to their ancestors. Ancestral worship is very common in Vietnam and therefore the family is valued at such high esteem. Buddhism is a very popular and the most common religion in the Vietnamese culture. Learning about their religious background will allow you to gain understanding on why they rarely take part in religious conversation. Their best efforts to practice religion is based their personal ritual events that are important to each family or individual. In the United States religion is always a very tenacious topic and many times can turn aggressive. Vietnamese people are not aggressive people they are reserve by nature and our book taught us that Asians control emotions and avoid aggressive behaviors. They avoid embarrassing, confronting, or damaging harmony. Asians promotes silence instead of verbalization. This is profoundly true in the Vietnamese culture and I have experienced it first hand dealing with Tami. Many times, we will have disagreements and she will go days without talking to me. When this first happened, I thought this was her way of ending the relationship. However, it was her way of controlling her emotions and internalizing how she will respond. Since I didn't understand her culture this was the way I felt and many times I responded to her with words that would try and get a response from her but not necessarily to hurt her. This is

usually their stance on religious topics because they believe what they believe and respect what you believe. The religion Confucianism has a major impact on how Asians speak. Confucianism teaches that words are to define and reflect moral development, words of embellishment lacking substance are to be avoided, actions speak louder than words, and appropriate speaking relies on rules of social correctness. The principals of Confucius are prevalent in the Vietnam culture and across every Asian country. Respect is one of the key things to remember when communicating with Vietnamese or anyone from another culture when it comes to religion. The worst thing is to self-impose your thoughts, beliefs, and expressions on someone of different culture without being invited. We must learn that because someone is silent on a subject because of their cultural background doesn't mean they are passive about the issue. There must be a time when sensitivity is exercised when communicating with different cultures. Politics is another one of those conversations that will garner somewhat of a different response than the one of Religion. Vietnam is a socialist republic with a government that includes an executive and legislature that is elected by the people. There is a national assembly, a president, and a prime minister that serves as head of the government. Although as I mentioned earlier there is not a complete communist rule anymore in Vietnam but many of the Communist Party members hold executive and administrative positions in the government. The political focus for many Vietnamese people are not the ruling parties but the social problems that exist because of political control. Many of the rural areas of Vietnam have been neglected by government and problems such as counterfeiting, theft, prostitution, and drug abuse has increased. This is always an open topic for Vietnamese people and it is easy to insult them when you become insensitive to why they are so passionate about giving back to their people. The government has committed strongly to social welfare and social change in the areas of health improvements, poverty, and economic development.

Therefore, the bond and commitment to helping each other is so strong among the Vietnamese people. Many that have went into other countries and cultures and became successful are the reason that the pressure is placed on the government. They are demanding that change occurs, or they will help as many families possible to leave and go to a better place.

In conclusion, communicating within our own culture is sometimes a challenge. It can be dreadfully challenging to communicate and understand a different culture. I learned that being patient and understanding the customs, traditions, and lifestyle of the Vietnam culture will help me to communicate better with Tami or any other Vietnamese persons I encounter. They are very passive and silent people who think about their response heavily before speaking. This is in know way an attempt to be insulting or condescending but its their upbringing. Religion and Politics are huge areas that affect the lives of Vietnamese culture. These two elements are the reason many have develop their views on life and how their parents instilled their views on life. Since I can better understand all these factors I am sure me or anyone that reads this will grasp the Vietnamese culture and communicate superbly.