



Saturday 30 May 2020 (p. 5)

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Cultural Capital Factors as Possible Causes of COVID-19 Situation Severity: Comparison between the East and the West

Culture took place in the society long time ago. It later becomes people's way of life. It may comprise of local wisdom, history and religion.

Culture is a behavior for each society which has been continuously being practiced for a long time. Then, it becomes social assets and has different impacts on people's lives.

I am an economist working on human capital so I regard culture as a kind of capital in my human capital theory (8K's+5K's new).



8 K's : Basic Capitals for Human Capital Development

- Human Capital
- Intellectual Capital
- Ethical Capital
- Happiness Capital
- Social Capital
- Sustainability Capital
- Digital Capital
- Talented Capital

5 K's (New) : New Capitals for Human Capital Development for the Globalization Era.

Creativity Capital
 Knowledge Capital
 Innovation Capital
 Emotional Capital
Cultural Capital

Human and culture are parts of human capital because of the following reasons.

First, people in each country have different experience in life socio-economic and cultural aspects. Thailand has been growing rice for a long time. Besides economic factor, there are other cultural factors like rice harvest custom. There is a culture in which people team up to grow rice. This is a cultural way of life. Harvest custom has been being practiced for a long time.

Buddhism and culture are parts of Thai society. There have been a lot of religious rites since the ancient time.

Food is a cultural factor which has been being pursued for a long time. It varies to diverse regions and provinces.

They are called "Capital". They were invested in the past. They can be used for value creation via human. Nowadays, Thai culture can be brought to promote tourism. Thai culture can reside in fashion, food, health care or Songkran Festival etc.

Today, I would like to mention about COVID-19. The statistical comparison between the East and the West shows significant differences. The West has more total cases and total deaths than the East as shown on these tables.

COVID-19 Statistics of the Western Countries			
Country	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Total Recovered
USA	1,745,803	102,107	490,130
Russia	370,680	3,968	142,208
Spain	283,849	27,118	196,958
UK	267,240	37,460	N/A
Italy	231,139	33,072	147,101
France	182,913	28,596	66,584
Germany	181,895	8,533	162,800

COVID-19 Statistics of the Eastern Countries			
Country	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Total Recovered
China	82,995	4,634	78,288
Japan	16,651	858	13,973
South Korea	11,344	269	10,340
Thailand	3,054	57	2,931
Vietnam	327		278
Cambodia	124		122

Source:

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?utm_campaign=homeAdvegas1?

Last updated on May 28, 2020

The question is what kinds of cultural factors greatly differentiate the COVID-19 figures between the East and the West.

I try to search for information from several sources indicating that culture is the crucial factor. The first one writing about this is Jeffrey D.Sachs from Columbia University. He is a famous economist in the U.S. He pointed out that cultural differences between the East and the West could explain the severity differences of COVID-19.

- Mask usage is commonly accepted in the East. For the West, the masks are for patients only. In Thailand, more than 90% of Thais wear masks.

In the U.S., the leader does not wear mask at all. He acts as a bad example like rejecting the medical advices. People in the U.S. think that when the leader does not wear it, neither do they. The COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. continues and the dead tolls still rise.

The second factor differentiating the East and the West is hand washing and social distancing. We must accept that a custom in the U.S. is not good example. When summer arrives, the lockdown is eased for people to go to the beach. If they do, they must have social distancing. Their culture does not worry about this. They can relax in the summer without caring for social distancing. Therefore, the number of infected cases in some states grows very fast.

Another western cultural factor is the greeting with physical touch like handshaking. This can be crucial carriers for more serious outbreak. In the East, people greet by Wai which promotes social

distancing and prevent outbreak. Some western countries adopt Wai as a new greeting way. Some may greet by elbow. This is a good example from the East to limit the outbreak.

- The eastern culture and tradition force people to strictly obey the leaders. For example, the Chinese government locked down Wuhan to prevent emigration. Despite freedom limit, it was effective. The western people do not believe this. They believe in their freedom. In Thailand, Gen. Prayut's government applied the curfew. Even though the freedom was limited, people think that they need to follow this law.

I see example when some businesses in Thailand like restaurants are eased from the lockdown. The seating is arranged based on social distancing rule. At a restaurant, I saw a foreigner dined with Thai fan but did not practice social distancing rule. They were fans so they sat close together. They did not have to practice social distancing rule. They forgot that this was Thailand's rule. They could be carriers. The owner asked me to tell them. I explained to them that it was Thailand's rule so the police can close this restaurant when they knew about their actions. Then, they understood. This is the concrete example of the East and the West cultural differences.

Another political culture difference between the western leader and the eastern leader is the expression etiquettes. Trump was dissatisfied with the dead tolls of 100,000 so he aggressively attacked China. He also blamed WTO as the main cause. He showed off his poor etiquettes.

The Chinese leader applied the eastern culture. He has good etiquettes to smartly express his standpoint. He did not allow this dignity to be harmed. He politely responded. He delegated his staffs to speak on his behalf. Then, people in the world understand the cultural differences between both countries. Expression must maintain diplomatic etiquettes and politeness.

Political culture of some western countries like the U.S., Brazil or Russia encourages the leaders to mainly care for their own benefits and political base. They do not pay attention to science and the outbreak. They do not listen to medical advices. Then, it becomes a kind of political culture focusing on the supporters and political base. Instead of succeeding in solving problems, this continuously worsens the outbreak. The leaders need only supporters' votes to win the election.

In conclusion, the western culture promotes more outbreak than the eastern culture does because of 7 reasons.

1.The western greeting culture has physical touch like handshake, hug and kiss.

2.The western culture promotes extrovert lifestyles so the western people prefer mass gathering activities.

3.The western culture promotes anti-collectivism so people focus more on their personal rights and comfort than the national benefits. They protest lockdown and this lead to more outbreaks.

4.The western culture regards that mask is for patients only. Healthy people do not wear masks to protect themselves because they are afraid that other people may think that they are sick. Moreover, patients are afraid to be socially disgusted so they do not wear masks either.

5.The western culture does not pay much attention to personal hygiene. People do not regard body wash as the top priority during the winter.

6.The western culture promotes social stigma and blamed some groups as carriers. President Donald Trump called COVID-19 as Chinese Virus. He blamed Chinese as the carriers. Later, Americans detest Asians and Asian-American doctors and see them as carriers. Then, American patients reject the treatment from Asian-American doctors. Therefore, the outbreak remains high.

7.The comfort zone culture encourages the western people to pursue the old lifestyles. They go out to gather for activities and relax in the public places despite the government's stay home campaign. Therefore, the outbreak remains high.



Joe Biden with Mask



Unmasked Trump on the Memorial Day



Trump went golfing amid the coronavirus outbreak, in Sterling, Virginia, on May 24



Despite the total dead tolls of nearly hundred thousands, Americans flocked to the beaches during the long holidays.

Prof. Dr. Chira Hongladarom

www.chiraacademy.com

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKyulC3wra76rasO-TmdjdA>