
Providing extraordinary insights, Barnes’s work is a blend of observations on current practices of nine countries (China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand) set against a backdrop that weaves geographic, political, religious, and ethnic considerations into an integrated narrative addressing how people resolve disputes. This effort is useful for helping break the Western perception of a monolithic “Far East” approach to negotiations and develops, instead, a series of descriptive and practical frameworks for negotiations practitioners.

His motivation for this research was to help the most diverse state in the United States (Hawaii) better address the reasons for its multiple approaches to conflict resolution. Simply put, he studied the “home cultures” of the ethnically diverse Hawaiian population to examine the antecedents to their current approach to conflict resolution, all with an eye to providing a better understanding of not necessarily what they negotiated over but how and why they negotiated the way they did, and what points of friction might occur when different negotiating styles collided.

He also acknowledges that the United States perceives alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as not only something “new” but also describes ADR’s potential as an effective and efficient alternative to the Americans’ more traditional reliance on contentious, adversarial litigation. But he also presents a successful argument debunking the concept of “spreading [the] ADR philosophy around the globe” as the same as spreading a new concept. He presents sufficient evidence that, in many cultures, the ADR “concept” is, in fact, many centuries old and also the historically preferred method of conflict resolution.

As with any book attempting to examine human nature and behavior, generalizations under the rubric of “culture” mean that granularity is sacrificed for the sake of brevity. This is not an uncommon approach to these studies and does not discount the book’s overall quality. However, the reader must realize that as the author reports, describes, and subsequently summarizes characteristics influencing the negotiating behavior of any one of these people within a culture, he is limited by what he can observe, summarize, and report. He cannot possibly observe and report on everyone that makes up a particular group under consideration. So this book, like many others, should act as a reference framework when preparing to engage in negotiations, not as a recipe for guaranteed success. His stories, illustrations, and observations are certainly instructive, but not directive.

Since religion is a major force within most of the Pacific Rim cultures, Barnes organizes his work into three major sections, all distinctive in their religion (Confucian East Asian Cultures, Muslim Southeast Asian, and Buddhist Southeast Asian). Furthermore, the author uses 15 “themes” to provide multiple lenses as each of the nine cultures within the three religious sections is examined. Or-
ganizationally and conceptually, the themes have merit and are based on sound principles, many addressing Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions. However, in execution, the depth of treatment varied greatly from culture to culture, and although some variation is expected and natural, some unexpected imbalances were presented. The biggest illustration of this imbalance is the treatment of the 15th theme: “contributions to the global practice of conflict resolution and training applications.” In the chapters representing China, the Philippines, and Korea, this 15th theme was not addressed while other countries got a more robust treatment (notably, Japan, Malaysia, and Thailand). One could argue that with China's current regional dominance and the real potential for its global dominance on many fronts, a discussion on the contributions to the global practice of conflict resolution and training applications from a Chinese perspective could have benefited a significant section of the reading audience, namely practitioners who are looking for clues and frameworks as they plan for and execute negotiations with the Chinese. This is, however, a relatively minor critique on an otherwise rich text, filled with confirming illustrations and numerous (over 30) case studies of just how geopolitics, religion, and culture have guided negotiation strategies for the subject cultures.

Another small but noticeable absence in his work is a closer examination of how these cultures define negotiations. For example, the Chinese symbol for negotiations is made up of two symbols, one representing “danger” and the other “opportunity.” In contrast, the Japanese perception of negotiations is very different. Traditionally, the Japanese perceive negotiations as a process to be avoided and minimized because of the cultural emphasis on *wa*, or harmony. Therefore, the act of negotiating demonstrates the failure of *wa*—something ingrained into Japanese culture as very negative. *Wa* is highly prized, and extensive efforts at preserving it occupy a central role in the harmonious and cooperative approach to Japanese culture. Many suggest that to successfully negotiate with the Japanese, extensive “prenegotiations” help to avoid disruption of the *wa* within the actual negotiations, thus preserving harmony.

A final simple but important critique. Dr. Barnes asserts that “culture is also very dynamic: it is always changing.” In this statement, he treats the multiple aspects of culture as a monolith, which runs counter to two arguments; one within his own book and one from other writings on culture. First, if culture changes are “very dynamic,” then the emphasis he places on tradition, history, religion, customs, and other shaping forces on culture should minimally impact a culture’s approach to conflict resolution. As a matter of course in his book, Dr. Barnes accurately suggests that culture does, indeed, heavily influence negotiating approaches; hence, culture may be changing but perhaps not as “dynamically” as he suggests. The second argument that runs counter to Dr. Barnes’s statement is research that suggests culture has multiple levels, and these levels have differing change rates. A much-cited model developed by American University’s Dr. Gary Weaver proposes that culture has multiple levels and reflects the essential characteristics of an iceberg (see “cultural iceberg” lecture slides developed by Dr. Weaver at http://www.purdue.edu/hr/pdf/WeaverPPT.pdf. Certain cultural elements (artifacts) are very
visible (like the part of the iceberg above the waterline) and are capable of relatively rapid change (just like the part of the iceberg above the waterline changes as it is affected by its environment). However, culture also resembles an iceberg below the waterline in that these elements are hidden from view but form a proportionately large part of how individuals (consciously and subconsciously) present themselves (through the artifacts, etc.). As an additional note, Dr. Weaver adds that these elements “far below the waterline” are not only unconditionally accepted as individuals “enculturate” into their primary culture but are also slow to change, for these deeply enculturated values, just like the iceberg, are insulated from the stormy environment above the “waterline.” This model suggests that perhaps the visible artifacts may change rapidly (such as the Japanese adopting Western dress), but the underlying cultural values (such as harmony, cooperativeness, etc.) may be much slower to change. I must emphasize that these three critiques are not meant to detract from the book’s overall quality. It is instructive, well organized, and of great utility for leaders intent on improving their ability to resolve conflict and negotiate across and between cultures.

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