

Bad Culture or Good Culture?

Harvard-based development theorists (Huntington*) have labeled some alleged Ghanaian cultural characteristics as “bad culture” in that they prevent development and some alleged Korean cultural characteristics as “good culture”. They go on to compare them attempting to show that Ghana’s development will occur if we reduce the “bad” and increase the “good”. An opposing view (Henry Cudjoe**) looks past what he terms their hidden agenda and calls this as another return to ‘social evolution theories’ of 1900, where Africa’s “savage” or “primitive” culture needs to be lifted up in imitation of the West.

What is your opinion? More importantly, where lies the Christian approach to development? Both Cudjoe and Huntington presuppose a fairly unchristian notion of development. In the blank spaces against the supposed Ghanaian traits write whether you think it is true and if it is “good” or “bad”. Be prepared to explain why. Please try to defend your view from a Christian perspective and not just as an emotional reaction.

Africa’s “Bad Culture” Scheme

AFRICA’S “BAD CULTURE”	YOUR OPINION
Secure in the status quo	
Lack of concern for tomorrow	
Sees space and time as a single entity	
Does nothing to prepare for the future	
Claim to magical powers	
All power equated with divine authority	
Devoted to the cult of mediocrity	
Jealousy	
Individual responsibility does not exist	
Works to live but does not live to work	
Friendship comes before business	
Avoids conflict	
Not better at econ management	
Irrational	
Uses intelligence least	
Violent	
Lacks initiative and dynamism	

There is little enthusiasm for work	
Weak controls over uncertainty	
Enslaved by its environment	
Anchored in his ancestral culture	
Religious	
Passive	
An enemy of competence	
Will not accept changes in social standing	
Intolerant	
Tribalistic	
Demonstrates a propensity to feast	
Prefers interpersonal warmth over content	
Saving for the future has low priority	
Magic and witchcraft flourish	
Ruled by tension, fear and moral disorder	
Disrespect for human rights	
Cannibalistic	
Totalitarian	

Korea's "Good Culture" Scheme

Hardworking	
Thrifty	
Tradition of effective government	
High levels of literacy	
Tight family structure	
Strong work ethic	
Self-disciplined	
Sense of national identity	
Inherent superiority	
Obedient	

Punctual	
Worshipful respect for authority	
Nationalistic	
Intense sense of group responsibility	
Sense of higher duty to country	
Ethical	
Moral	
Patriotic	
Collective commitment to modernize	
General schooling	
Importance of self-improvement	
Respected achievement motivation	
Delays gratification	
Reliance on social networks	
Propensity to save	
Bond of family	
Priority away from warfare toward industry and commerce	

Salient Cultural Features as Compared by Cudjoe

Ghanaian Culture	Korean Culture
Religious	Belief in ancestor worship
Verbal	
Hospitable	Generous
Extremely sociable	Warmth
Recreational	Hardworking
Appreciation for reciprocity	
Steeped in oral tradition	Folksy
Ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity	Ethnically homogeneous
Belief in education	Thirst for education
Family is important and extended	Filial piety and male line important, prefer male child over female

Culture organized around kinship	
Matrilineal & Patrilineal	Patrilineal
Belief in mutual aid and assistance	
Obligation to help others	Kindness
Respect for elders and authority	Deference to older and superior persons
Strong ethnic identity & affiliation	Influenced by Chinese culture
Rural, increasingly urban (50%)	
Transmit values through proverbs, songs, stories and rituals	Shamanism, Buddhism & Confucianism are important elements of culture
Culture expressed in language, dress, cus	
Cross-cutting loyalties with respect to ethnic identity, values, allegiances	
Music and dance parts of cultural express	Highly developed aesthetic sense

* Socio-economic theorists are presently engaged in a battle over whether or not “African culture” is at the root of underdevelopment in that continent.

** Henry Cudjoe critiques the position of what he refers to as the “Culture matters group” as being just an updated version of the century old “Primitives vs Civilization” socio-evolutionary theories. They expressed their views in a book by Samuel Huntington entitled: *Culture Matters*, and in a recent article in the *Economist* 2000 in which Huntington compares Korea—a developmental miracle, with Ghana—an economic failure. Henry Cudjoe (“Critique of the Culture-Development Thesis” in *Critical Perspectives on Politics and Socio-Economic Development in Ghana*, Tettey, Korbia, Pupliampu, Berman eds. Leiden: Brill, 2003) holds that it is not culture at all but strong government and the backing of powerful states, especially Japan and the US, that has made Korea what it is—and Ghana what it *isn't*. Cudjoe has a point but he too has an agenda. For example, he does not mention, the obliterating effects of Acheampong’s 9-year kleptocracy or the outmigration of 25% of Ghana’s educated elites as factors related to Ghana’s underdevelopment. In our opinion culture does matter, although not in the way proposed by Huntington or Cudjoe. The difference hovers around the definition of development. We take a Christian holistic view which rests on cultural foundations.