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CULTURE, GENDER, AND BUSINESS

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Article

Culture, Gender, and Business

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Abstract: This paper provides an overview of the complex relationship between culture, gender, and business. It highlights the importance of understanding how these factors intersect and influence various aspects of the business world, including organizational practices, leadership styles, workplace dynamics, and economic outcomes. It also explores how cultural factors shape gender roles, expectations, and opportunities within the business context. Additionally, it discusses the implications of cultural influences on women's participation, advancement, and overall experiences in the business world. Understanding the interplay between culture, gender, and business is essential for fostering inclusive and diverse workplaces. Organizations that embrace cultural diversity and gender equality tend to exhibit greater creativity, innovation, and adaptability. They also benefit from increased employee satisfaction, improved decision-making processes, and enhanced financial performance. The work also examined how the values, beliefs, socialization, and team spirit of some distinct ethnic groups such as Japanese, Chinese, Jews, Igbo, and Indians have helped in the economic growth of not the groups alone but the countries where they reside. By examining these dynamics and cultures, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can gain insights to develop effective strategies that promote gender equality, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive practices in the business world, ultimately leading to more equitable and prosperous societies.

Keywords: culture; gender; business; organization; religion; diversity

INTRODUCTION

Culture is viewed by many as the totality of man's way of life. Beliefs, values, socialization, a sense of loyalty, a common language, etc. have played a tremendous role in business growth around the world. We all know, for example, that the overseas Chinese are very entrepreneurial, but we do not seem to know much about why they are. To be sure, even finding such culturally specific patterns is an important contribution, because the patterns may suggest possibilities for answering the "why" question.[1]

Many analysts have concluded that Japanese, Korean, Jewish, Igbo, and Chinese cultures, despite their vast differences, appear to be particularly well suited to those entrepreneurial activities that traditionally have led to capitalist industrialization. As many scholars have pointed out, cultures are as varied as nations, ethnic groups, religious sects, occupational groups, companies, and clubs. Indeed, any collection of people whose thinking and practices are distinct from that of others may be said to have a culture.[2]

In learning the language, the child absorbs a way of thinking and expressing his thoughts that is predetermined by the language, and so he receives a stamp that he can scarcely remove from his life. Language opens up the way for a person to exchange thoughts with all who use it: he can influence and receive influence from them.

An essential feature of an ethnic group is that members share the same ethics and play by the same rules. Every trader who belongs to the same ethnic group benefits from belonging to the group because of the existence of shared ethics or cultural norms that function to reduce transaction costs of protecting contracts. Because of this fact, cultural norms embedded in an ethnic group may be considered to be local public goods/assets or "social capital." ' Since cultural norms of behavior are specific to particular ethnic groups, these norms may also be considered as ethnic-specific assets. The importance of ethnic-specific assets is that the identity of individuals matters. Traders/entrepreneurs prefer to transact with insiders rather than outsiders. It is in this context that symbols of individual

and group identity-such as names, clan names, dietary rules, language, and religion play an important signaling function in transmitting nonprice information on the identity of potential partners.[3] A critical analysis of the role of culture in business growth will be examined below.

CHINESE CULTURE AND BUSINESS

The ethos of Hong Kong's "entrepreneurial familism" involves the Jia, the family, as the basic unit of production, saving, and economic competition. It provides the impetus for innovation and support for risk-taking, an ethos that is by no means confined to the richer segment of the population who already own family firms, but it permeates the whole of society. Where there is little physical capital to be developed, heads of less well-off families can still marshal the limited Jia resources and try to cultivate human capital for collective advancement.[4] Janet Salaff, in her study of twenty-eight middle and working-class Hong Kong families, for instance, found that all the working daughters contributed major portions of their income to the budget of their families. Once these families had acquired the basic material necessities (such as adequate quarters and essential consumer durables), "more resources were invariably channeled into the education of younger sons and daughters." Salaff concludes that "each family thus appears to improve its position in life using the combined income of the wage-earning members." [5]

There is a relationship between the core values of the traditional Chinese family and Hong Kong's newly burgeoning entrepreneurial familism. For instance, the widespread ideal of Hong Kong Chinese to become one's own boss, to be an independent entrepreneur, may be related to the inheritance pattern of the past that recognized brothers as independent and equal claimants to the family estate. While the popular desire to strike out on one's own makes for an abundant supply of entrepreneurs in Hong Kong, it also produces a shortage of dedicated managers and dependable executives in the corporate world. Hong Kong's famed paternalistic management style may be traced to the traditional Chinese family as well. The pronounced autocracy of the father-headed family firm is widely held to be responsible for the uncommon adaptability and maneuverability of Hong Kong enterprises. Today, as in the past, this pattern is rarely resented, as it is perceived to add to the fortune of the family as a whole. In any case, each family member holds an equal share of the family's assets. The fierce competition one encounters in Hong Kong at every turn is similarly held to be a legacy of the past. While in the past competition was between families, today it is between firms. [6] As a result, there is a rarity of oligopolistic groupings and monopolistic ventures that could prevent other individual enterprises from moving up. With few institutional barriers to upward and downward movements along the social ladder, family fortunes appear to rise and fall in quick succession, and the socioeconomic order appears. Researchers agree in general that a particular family firm does not last longer than approximately two and a half to three generations.[7]

INDIAN CULTURE AND BUSINESS

Caste/region/language—or religion-based business communities—prevailed for centuries in India before the advent of colonial rule. The colonists catalyzed disruptions in traditional trading patterns, as well as shifted economic power to colonial masters. British rule led to the considerable decline of old family firms and, in turn, introduced new methods of banking, managing agencies, and chambers of commerce that fluidly connected the Indian subcontinent to the global economic order.

In India, family businesses are predominantly caste-based, and their roots run deep and are embedded in family values and traditions. As a result, their respective cultures can be seen in the management, operations, and decision-making process of the business. Family businesses contribute around 79 percent of the national GDP annually in India. India has 108 publicly-listed, family-owned businesses, making it the third-highest in the world behind China at 167 and the United States at 121 (as of 2015). Family business groups have dominated the Indian industrial sector since its independence. Today, large-scale manufacturing companies in the organized sector are controlled by

Indian families, such as the Tata, Birla, and Ambani families, who have promoted various industries.[8]

Network appears to be the primary tool of Indian business survival: family networks, religious networks, and friendship networks, all play a role in Indian businesses. Networks appeared to play a role in all aspects of the business, from the provision of initial credit and stock to help behind the counter to import/export contacts.[9]

Both religion and family play a role in the development of business skills and values. Family provides approval, as well as specific business teaching and socialization: "Mother was the key pin . . . she gave us our courage, pushed us, promoted us, showed us how to behave as business people and be enterprising." There is no question of business in itself being an immoral occupation, or money being tainted: "God provided it that one should see to the increment of one's fortunes for the sake of the children . . . Ultimately our belief is that if you have good intentions if you're honest and straightforward and you do hard work, you must see success." [10]

The Indians in South Africa were able to draw on their religious, family, and ethnic resources to overcome the obstacles placed in their way by legislative and social discrimination during the apartheid era. The earliest legislation, limiting Indian immigration and land ownership, probably had its origins in white envy of Indian business success and fear of business competition." The worst blow to Indian businesses came from the Group Areas Act of 1950, which demarcated specific areas for occupation by members of particular racial groups and forced Indian businesses from the prosperous white areas into enclosed Indian areas. Nevertheless, the Indian businessmen not only survived but prospered, using white nominees and front companies, and attracting white customers to the areas where Indians could legally operate.[11]

JEWSH CULTURE AND BUSINESS

Jews are believed to be one of the most successful ethnic groups in the world. Despite several years of persecution and Anti-Semitism, they have continued to record remarkable feats in business, and other human endeavours. All of which have been attributed to its unique culture.

Jewish Americans are, as a group, the wealthiest ethnic group in America.[12] Forty percent of the top 40 of the Forbes 400 richest Americans are Jewish. One-third of American multimillionaires are tallied as Jewish. Twenty percent of professors at leading universities are Jewish. Forty percent of partners in the leading law firms in New York and Washington are Jewish. Thirty percent of American Nobel Prize winners in science and twenty-five percent of all American Nobel winners are Jewish.[13] "With virtually no natural resources [Israel] has created the highest standard of living in the Middle East and is home to the highest number of NASDAQ-listed companies anywhere outside of the United States ...".[14] Approximately 80% of Israeli citizens are Jewish; the remainder are largely Arabs.

The Jewish culture shares a religion that unites them all over the world today, but when immigrating to South Africa in the early 1900s the unity that kept them together was cultural structure, heritage, and a common fight for survival. Makura, a researcher compiled a list of the most successful entrepreneurs in South Africa, of which 80% were Jewish.[15] Most of the Jewish business people (84%) came from families that owned businesses and the other 16% were from families who did not own businesses.[16] Most Jewish business people in South Africa view managing good networks as a vital skill in their businesses. This is followed by financial management, cash flow, pricing, and costing, then business linkages, industry clusters, and networking. [17]

During the late Middle Ages, there was a significant growth of cities in Europe. Businesses, cathedrals, and universities drew populations to those city centers. Funding of city services came from the land, tuition from students, business levies, and special taxes on minority groups such as Jews and Muslims. Cities also drew income from banking and mortgaging land, which could raise considerable sums when nobles were running into financial difficulties, or churches were caught midway in expensive building programs. Jews, unencumbered by the Christian prohibition of usury, played a prominent part in these activities and paid a heavy cost for it. They were liable to pogroms,

such as those which swept the Rhineland cities in 1096, and to arbitrary levies by their lords; when the king of France arrested the Jews in the crown lands in 1180, he was able to ransom them for the considerable sum of 15,000 marks. [18]

To the Jews, the physical universe was created by God. All Jews are to care for and preserve the creation. "...wanton destruction of any kind is a violation of Torah law. This is known as the principle of Bal Tashchit...a prohibition against unnecessary destruction or waste". "Wasteful consumption is proscribed by the Torah. Soldiers are not permitted to cut down fruit trees even when besieging an enemy's city (Deuteronomy 20:19)". The land is to be given a rest every seventh year. This practice keeps the land from being depleted.[19]

Persons with means must share with the poor. A traditional goal is to give 10% of one's income to help persons needing resources. The best giving is to forgive a loan. Best of all is helping a person find a job or resources that take the person out of poverty. On the other hand, people should not give away their wealth and destitute themselves in the process. Judaism has a positive attitude toward wealth and business, provided they are used and practiced according to the Torah and Talmud, which particularly means that wealth must be used to assist widows, orphans, and the needy in society.

For Jews, wealth is a good thing, a worthy and respectable goal to strive toward. What's more, once you earn it, it is tragic to lose it. Judaism has never considered poverty a virtue. The first Jews were not poor, and that was good. The Jewish founding fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were blessed with cattle and land in abundance. Asceticism and self-denial are not Jewish ideals. With your financial house in order, it is easier to pursue your spiritual life. Poverty causes transgression. -Hasidic folk say Poverty in a man's house is worse than fifty plagues. -The Talmud (a collection of books of rabbinical commentary on the Old Testament)[20]

Gaining knowledge for knowledge's sake is a core Jewish value. But it's also true that wealth flows naturally from knowledge. In the U.S., the progression of income moves in lockstep with education. Jews pursue education and wealth far more than the purchase of "toys." Jews have been forced from their homes not just during the big expulsion from Israel by the Romans in 100 A.D., or during the flight from Nazi Germany in the late 1930s and 1940s, but also repeatedly throughout history. It has long been imperative that Jews have portable wealth and skills to survive.[21] For centuries Jews have been referred to as the "The People of the Book." Jews bury religious books that have become worn with age and use, as a sign of respect for their contents and out of respect for the written word. From a very young age, Jewish children celebrate education. As part of their religious training, Jews intensely study the Bible or Torah, the Talmud, and the Mishna. The Talmud consists of books of detailed rabbinical commentary on the Bible. The Mishna consists of books codifying the Jewish laws for prayer, religious observance, and everyday living.

The Jewish religion focuses on the individual and his or her own spiritual exploration and journey. It is therefore important that Jews are involved in spirited discussions and debates about the various stories and laws in their religious texts as a means of forming a personal and intellectual attachment to their religion. Beyond the context of religious readings, critical thinking skills are encouraged and developed in the Jewish community. These highly transferable skills also form the basis for many secular pursuits in the humanities, the sciences, and business. It is therefore not so surprising that 40 percent of American Nobel Prizes in science and economics have been awarded to Jews, and Jews have won 25 percent of all the Nobel Prizes awarded to Americans.' Despite a lack of secular educational opportunities throughout their history, the Jews' religious training created a literate and intellectual culture that celebrated academic achievement. When educational opportunities became available, especially in America, the Jewish people were prepared by their family and community environment.[22] In 1890 there were few Jews practicing law or medicine in New York City. By 1900, there were four hundred to six hundred Jewish doctors in the city and several thousand in teaching and other professions. In the 1930s, 55 percent of doctors, 64 percent of dentists, and 65 percent of lawyers in New York City were Jewish." This was despite quotas restricting the admittance of Jews to institutions of higher learning.[23]

Jews zealously deploy their wealth and their time for both charity and social action. It is written in the Talmud: "You're only as wealthy as the amount you are able to give." In the Jewish community as a whole, Jews' giving has made them very wealthy. The Book of Leviticus is even more explicit: "You are forbidden to reap the whole harvest; a remnant in the corner must be left for the poor." Total Jewish philanthropic giving totaled about \$4.5 billion in 1997. This includes \$1.5 billion to federations including UJA, \$2 billion to synagogues, \$700 million sent to Israel outside UJA (which came to be known as United Jewish Communities in 1999), and \$250 million for educational, religious, and community relations institutions and agencies.; Among the nation's most generous donors, Jews are prominent. Worth magazine's annual "Benefactor 100" contained thirty-five Jewish philanthropists in April 1999. The magazine's list is especially relevant because it counts lifetime donations that have already been put to work. Leading the list was George Soros, who has given more than \$2 billion to charity. Bill Gates (No. 15 and not Jewish) was credited with \$196 million, and Ted Turner (No. 23 and also not Jewish) with \$172 million because their billion-dollar foundations remain primarily undistributed. [24]

Jews differ in their views of charitable giving. Jews are taught that charity is an obligation rooted in social justice, not in love or pity for their fellow man. The word for charity in Hebrew is tzedakah, from the root word Zedek meaning "justice" or "righteousness." The word "charity" comes from the Latin word caritas, meaning "love." Likewise, "philanthropy," derived from the Greek, means "love of mankind." Support of social justice is a common theme in Jewish giving because of the Jews' long history of suffering discrimination. Another important way in which Jews have helped their own financially has been the creation of Jewish Free Loan Societies to directly help immigrants and others in need. There are about forty of these institutions around the country, and they make about \$40 million in loans each year, interest-free. Local endowments support these societies, exclusively funded by the Jewish community. As it is written in the Book of Exodus, "If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor; exact no interest from them." These societies exist to make loans to people with no assets and with little or no credit history, and to loan smaller amounts than banks would typically bother with. At the turn of the century, it was a way for recent Jewish immigrants to go into business and become self-supporting. In New York City, Jewish peddlers would use their loans to buy their initial merchandise for their pushcarts. [25]

Jews are rarely satisfied with the status quo. It's a Jewish axiom that "everything is so right that something must be wrong." Even if things are good, there is always room for improvement and a reason to be on guard. If a business is doing well, it could still be more profitable. Competitors could overtake the company, and there might be a recession. Do you see the bagel or the hole in its middle? Things never seem to be right. This kind of thinking drives Jewish people to push for new and better ideas in order to secure their place in the world. Mr. Simon: How is business on Halstead Street? Mr. Katz: How can the men's clothing business ever be good in Chicago? The weather is against us. Mr. Simon: Just what do you mean? Mr. Katz: Here's the situation. In summer it is so hot that people hesitate to venture out, while you stay in the store and lose money. In winter it is so cold that people are afraid to leave their homes, while your expenses go on and you lose money. Mr. Simon: Why then leave your store open? Mr. Katz: If I close up, how will I make a living? At home, this restlessness is part of a child's education. Good grades are not enough. "All A's and a B+ in math? Why the poor showing in math?" Things can always be done better. The Jewish community is a tough audience to please because there are so many successful students from successful families. A good performance is taken for granted. To stand out you must do something really big. With each improving grade, the child proves himself to be the bright Jewish child his parents and community expect. This stereotypical expectation keeps the pressure on throughout a Jew's life.[26]

IGBO APPRENTICESHIP CULTURE AND BUSINESS

The apprenticeship training system is a human resource development scheme that blends learning and training in preparing individuals to set up, own, and run independent businesses. Historically, apprenticeship is the oldest form of training in the world of work and business. Through an apprenticeship scheme known as "Igba-boi", this ethnic group has dominated and continued to

excel above their contemporaries from other ethnic groups in business. The apprenticeship system was brought to the limelight in Nigeria after the Nigerian-Biafran war. Many parents who were left with nothing after the war were forced to send their children (8-20 years) to survive as traders. This was how Igbo settlers after the war rebuilt Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, and most parts of Lagos. In the apprenticeship system, the “Oga” and “Nwabo” agree for a period ranging from 4-7 years whereby the apprentice is to serve and learn from the “Oga”. Usually, the mode of settlement is contained in the agreement.[27]

The program entails engaging an individual or a person that has decided to embark on and learn a specific skill or job by working for a fixed period, for someone very good at that job or skill. The apprentice can be a teenager or young person, male or female who embarks on learning or receiving practical training skills, and also sometimes theoretical knowledge in a specialized area of vocation, trade, or occupation he/she has chosen to trade on for some time. And for apprenticeship, some have suggested that it is an effective mechanism for easy learning transition for young people to move from a school-based approach to the world of work or other tasks associated with such.

The Igbo culture and traditions teach that: a hand that does not pick dirt does not see wealth and prosperity. This is the more reason the Igbos are focused, self-contented, and self-made. Learning a trade has always been the norm with the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria. An Igbo person believes in controlling his financial ‘destiny’ and the best way to guarantee this is through commerce and venture into business. In Nigeria, across the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory, anywhere the Igbo people are doing business, this method is established. Here, the apprentice, upon completion of their apprenticeship pays the master a ‘freedom fee’, buys drinks, and throws a party according to his or her financial abilities before they can graduate and get on with their trade officially.[28] The Igbo apprentice system creates a network of traders who are independent and have practical financial management knowledge, zero-capital entrepreneurship skills, principles of local and international trading, and people management. This knowledge, which can hardly be obtained in a university, saves them from the costly trial-and-error business methods and risky experiments that can decimate capital and ruin investments. Considering the foregoing, I strongly believe that Nigeria can make headway in tackling unemployment and lowering the rate of startup failure in Nigeria by aligning the Igbo apprenticeship system with modern forms of apprenticeship that exist in many businesses in Nigeria as internships. Too many youths are idle and unable to sustain businesses, even when given the capital to do so. They will certainly fare better if exposed to the effective apprenticeship system which does not require raising huge capital.[29]

JAPANESE CULTURE AND BUSINESS

Japan is a mountainous island nation. The proportion of arable land to population is among the lowest in the industrialized world. Its inhabitants crowd together in the mountain valleys and along the coasts in densely populated enclaves. Japan is also subject to regular frequent disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes, and the regular possibility of crop failure. And, finally, these islands contain very little in the way of readily extractable natural resources. Instead, they have achieved a high level of success through their education system. A long history in such a challenging environment has had a profound effect on Japanese culture; people developed very strong cooperative ties as a collective survival mechanism. Society recognized early on that a lack of natural resources meant that the best way to succeed was through developing human capital. The result is a culture in which great value is placed on education and skills on the one hand, and the group and social relations on the other. In Japan, there is a shared belief that if the individual works tirelessly for the group, the group will reciprocate. But if one flouts the group, one can expect very little from society.[30]

Japan is a highly homogeneous society known for its collectivistic views that put the harmony of groups before the individual. It has one of the richest histories of culture in the world. Its culture is said to be a multi-layered structure where the reciprocal - 4 - relationships between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism are selectively adopted and tailored into their cultural elements. These

philosophies are the pillars of the foundation for the societal norms seen in Japan's business culture. For example, Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion that has no founder or doctrines, focused on the development and preservation of communities. The central aspect of Shinto is the purification of both mind and body. The purified mind (seimeishin; 清明心) should be unselfish, holding the community in the highest regard. This connects further to Confucianism which supported social harmony, loyalty to superiors, and benevolence towards inferiors. The tenets of Confucianism promote the presence of a collective mentality, where they can maintain relationships in well-defined hierarchies. The dependence on family character within traditional companies has fostered various long-term company-employee relations that influence Japan's current management practices such as lifetime employment and seniority-based promotions. Confucian philosophy also had a great influence on the samurai in the Edo period (1600 - 1868). While Confucianism swayed samurai to the attainment of valuing family relations, Buddhism would be considered the mental discipline that helped them succeed in their honorable pursuits.[31]

Japanese business culture includes strong ethics, etiquette, values, visions, and working style. It is a cocktail of the daily activities of the business that can impact management styles, decision-making, or basically all business functions. [32]

Prior to the Tokugawa era, Japanese culture had been a warrior culture. The Samurai had the highest social status in the nation for a long time. During the Tokugawa era, for about 250 years up until the middle of the 19th century, Japan was at peace. From the middle of the 19th century the Samurai, while retaining their social status, replaced their swords with pens to become the bureaucrats who ran the country. Largely isolated from the outside world, Japan prospered and enjoyed a rich culture. By 1850, at least a quarter of the Japanese were literate, putting Japan about even with Europe, although it lagged behind the Europeans in technology and finance.[33]

Towards the end of the Tokugawa era, Japan's government was beset by endemic corruption and incompetence. When the American Admiral Matthew Perry's "Black Ships" appeared in 1853, Japan was wholly unprepared to resist Perry's demands that Japan opens for trade on terms favourable to the West. The tottering Tokugawa regime was overthrown in 1868 by a rebellion led by lower-ranked bureaucrats rebelling against the incompetence of the dying regime. The emperor was restored to the throne in the Meiji Restoration. The leadership goals at the time of the Meiji era were anchored to do whatever was necessary to establish a relationship of equals with the Western nations that had entered and humiliated Japan. The new government sent an enormous delegation to the Western nations to rewrite the unequal treaties that had been imposed on Japan. When nearly half of the leadership of the new government crossed the seas, they were astonished at what they saw. Realizing that advanced education, science, and technology had made possible the industrial strength that had made the "opening" of Japan to the West possible, these Japanese officials came back to Japan determined to match the achievements of the West in education, science, and technology and upgrade their military. [34]

Shortly after the Meiji Restoration, Japanese industrialization began. The nation's industrialization was swift and complete. In 1853, Japan was a backward nation with no international prowess. By the turn of the century, Japan had surprised many and become one of the world's leading industrial nations. The rapid Japanese industrialization was largely due to the new structure established under the Meiji Restoration. The father-emperor bent his will on swift industrialization, and for the good of the nation, his loyal citizen-children obeyed his commands. Infant industries were allocated heavy government subsidization, quickly growing strong under the watchful eye of their parent government. The centralization of Japanese industry was key to the swift success of industrialization. Without the household-like organization of politics established in Japan through the Meiji restoration, such centralization, and success would not have been possible.[35]

Zaibatsu, the business conglomeration of modern Japan, provides another example of the successful nature of the traditional household organization. Much like a family, zaibatsu are composed of many interacting units united under a common goal. "Several of the great commercial households off the premodern era, including the Mitsui and the Sumitomo, survived and evolved into the most powerful zaibatsu." In the case of these zaibatsu, the father figure is represented by a

central holding company. Like children, many sub-divisions and related companies branch out from the center. These divisions accomplish diverse tasks for the good of the entire conglomeration. Certain zaibatsu have taken root overseas, extending their influence internationally. Many of the world's most successful multinational corporations are composed of Japanese zaibatsu. This success, however, would not have been possible without the strong framework of traditional household organization. Another factor behind the success of zaibatsu has been the prestige and honor of modern businessmen. Referred to as "salarymen" in Japan, these industrious workers often sacrifice family life and recreation for the good of the company. "The hardworking "salaryman" is a high ideal in Japan, one reminiscent of the loyal samurai of Japanese history and legend." [36]

Japanese success may be largely attributed to tradition. The traditional household structured organization of Japan has paved the way for its miraculous twentieth-century productivity and economic success. Shinto ideals have proven the tests of time adding to the pride, national unity, and cultural richness of the nation. Through dedication and ingenuity, even geographical isolation has been overcome. The once-prevailing Japanese isolation mentality has dissolved with modern interdependence.

RELIGION AND BUSINESS

The nexus between religion and business growth can be observed in various ways, depending on the cultural and religious context. Many religions provide ethical guidelines and principles that can influence business practices. These principles may promote honesty, fairness, integrity, and social responsibility. Adhering to religious ethics can enhance a company's reputation, build trust with stakeholders, and contribute to long-term business growth. Religious beliefs often emphasize diligence, discipline, and hard work as virtues. These values can contribute to a strong work ethic, which in turn can lead to increased productivity and business success.

Religious communities often foster strong social networks and can provide opportunities for business growth. Places of worship, religious gatherings, and community events can serve as platforms for networking and establishing business connections. Religious organizations may also offer support and resources to entrepreneurs and encourage economic cooperation within their communities.

Religious beliefs and practices can influence consumer behavior and preferences. Certain religious groups may have specific dietary restrictions or preferences, which can create niche markets for businesses that cater to these needs. Additionally, consumers may prefer to support businesses that align with their religious values, leading to potential growth for enterprises that promote ethical and socially responsible practices.

Religious organizations often engage in charitable activities and social welfare initiatives. Businesses that align themselves with religious values and actively participate in philanthropy can enhance their reputation and brand image. Engaging in socially responsible practices can attract customers, investors, and employees who value corporate social responsibility, thereby contributing to business growth.

Religious beliefs and values can inspire individuals to become entrepreneurs and drive innovation. Entrepreneurship is often associated with a sense of purpose and a desire to contribute positively to society, which aligns with religious teachings. Religious communities may provide support, mentorship, and resources for budding entrepreneurs, fostering an environment conducive to business growth.

RELIGION AND BUSINESS PENTECOSTALISM AND BUSINESS

Pentecostals are found relatively more often in occupations that already possess some element of personal self-determination, however lowly and intermittent the actual employment may be. They acquire certain skills through their experience in the group, they alter their patterns of consumption, they build up family solidarity, they help each other, and they cope better with the vicissitudes of life. [37]

Beliefs, values, and morality traditionally reside in the realm of religion and culture. In the last 30 years, there has been a massive 'Pentecostal explosion' that has radically altered the religious landscape in much of the developing world. Millions of people in Africa and elsewhere have joined Pentecostal churches. From humble beginnings as an early twentieth-century revivalist movement among America's poorer socio-economic groups, Pentecostalism has spread across the globe to become what is widely believed to be the fastest-growing Christian movement today.[38]

The point about the advancement achieved by pastors and leaders is worth elaboration. Presumably, those Pentecostals who become leaders have superior abilities in the milieu from which they came. Although they have lacked the conventional means of educational and economic improvement, they have nevertheless advanced to the leadership of an autonomous network of believers. In running a religious organization, they have become a kind of moral entrepreneur. In this role, they acquire modest economic resources, as well as connections, contacts, and even international vistas denied to others. They are therefore an emergent stratum of some significance, and moreover, one which offers a model to fellow believers for emulation.[39]

Pentecostal beliefs have been said to transform the individual into an economic powerhouse. Many Pentecostals strive to become rich because they believe that this is what God wants for them. While the 'traditional' African is generally rather fatalist and accepts her lot, the Pentecostal African has a strong sense of agency and believes that she can improve her situation with hard work and deeply felt prayer. While the 'traditional' African favours stability and is slow to take risks, the Pentecostal African strives for improvement and is more likely to try something new. These changes to the individual, and to the web of social relations in which they find themselves, have a huge impact on economic behaviour.[40] What is unique in Protestantism is relative freedom from ecclesiastical and social authority combined with adequate means for sustaining an independent existence.

Most of the followers of Pentecostalism in Africa come from either the poor or the new middle class. Many poor people, particularly the urban poor, first come to Pentecostal churches feeling wretched, despised, and hopeless. Often newly disconnected from tightly knit communities in the countryside, they feel lost and bewildered in the urban environment and struggle to find somewhere to live and enough to eat. Their self-esteem is low and they feel powerless to change their situation. Engagement with a Pentecostal church, and their ensuing conversion, can radically change these people's sense of themselves and their place in the world. Through their engagement with pastors and other church members, in study, prayer, and healing, these people begin to see themselves as valued individuals, part of God's people, a 'somebody' rather than a 'nobody'. Most important of all, they begin to move beyond passive fatalism and come to realize that they have agency in their lives. Eventually, they shift from seeing themselves as a victim to seeing themselves as a victor. [41]

In an interview with a Pentecostal convert in Lomé, Togo: When I walk down the street as a Christian, I hold my head high. I know I have something that others don't. I am not wealthy and I am not classed ['classé'], but I have something even better. I have Jesus on my side, and with Jesus anything is possible. Others look at me and wonder where this confidence comes from because they don't see money or class. But this is what Jesus does for you. Every day I get out of bed and feel that today will be even better than the day before.[42]

Pentecostalism has helped to encourage saving and investing and discourage frivolous spending. Pentecostalism also changes economic behaviour, for both the rich and the poor, by changing consumption patterns. Across the world, Pentecostals call on their followers to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and extramarital relationships (including visits to prostitutes). As believers make strong efforts to change their behavior in the name of Jesus, they bring about a highly significant change in their spending patterns. This leads to a marked limitation of 'wasteful consumption' and a reorientation towards investment and accumulation.[43]

THE ISLAMIC MOURIDES OF SENEGAL AND BUSINESS

The Mourides, a Sufi Sunni sect indigenous to Senegal, is a growing religious order with prodigious financial resources and a strong centralized power structure derived from spiritual

origins without any violent tendencies. Groundnut production is integral to Senegalese society, and Mourides are estimated to produce roughly half of the country's groundnut crop. Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke the founder of Mourides, stressed and celebrated the hard work of agrarian life, and the economic autonomy that this allowed the Mourides to contribute to their high station in the political power structure. A well-known Mourides aphorism reflects the conflation of work and faith: “Pray as if you will die tomorrow and work as if you will live forever.”[44]

The work ethic and strong bond of trust are seen as two reasons why the Mourides have become one of the most successful African communities, both back home in Senegal and in doing business abroad. When leaving Senegal, a Mouride becomes part of a complex network of international commerce. They can count on help with visas and loans to get started. The goods sold in the West are often bought from stores run by other Mourides, imported from Senegal and Asian countries like China, India, and Indonesia. A Mouride mosque is often built in Western cities from Mouride money. There, they meet once a week to pray and coordinate the business. They see who needs money and organize purchases of goods that they export back home to Senegal to be sold in markets run by other Mourides. The system is built on the deep trust that unites the Mourides, which has made banks unnecessary. If a trader needs something, he calls another trader to fix it, and relatives in Senegal then transfer the money owed. The Mourides are not only street sellers in the West; they are also involved in many different businesses. “Work and don’t complain much. That’s the only doctrine they have, the only network they have is workaholic” says Moustapha Diao, a Mouride living in New York. It seems as if the Mourides have found a way to adapt to the modern, globalized world by skipping banks and other economic institutions, instead, basing the business around religious trust and emphasizing the collective rather than the individual.[45]

GENDER AND BUSINESS

Women’s involvement in income generation tends to boost family income, support children’s education, improve the health of family members, provide food, build assets for the family, and contribute to the general development of economies. However, women have not been performing these roles due to constraints placed consciously or inadvertently on women by society, limiting them from engaging in income-earning ventures. Even those who wish to venture into economic activities face both economic and non-economic challenges limiting their enterprise. These challenges exclude women from being involved in economic activities.

According to Wikipedia, in 2022, there were 2,668 billionaires in the world women accounted for only 327 while men accounted for 2,341 of the 2,688.[46] What this translates to is that women accounted for only 12.26% of the world’s billionaires in 2022 while men accounted for the rest 87.74 %. Worse, 226 of the 327 of these female billionaires inherited their fortunes.

Forbes’s list of the 10 world’s richest billionaires as of March 2023 is as follows:

NAME	COMPANY/INDUSTRY	NETWORTH
1. Bernard Arnault & family	(LVMH)	\$223.1 B
2. Elon Musk	(Tesla, SpaceX)	\$187.9
3. Jeff Bezos	(Amazon)	\$125.1 B
4. Larry Ellison	(Oracle)	\$120.5 B

5. Bill Gates	(Microsoft)	\$109.9 B
6. Warren Buffett	(Berkshire Hathaway)	\$109.7 B
7. Michael Bloomberg	(Bloomberg LP)	\$94.5 B
8. Carlos Slim Helu & family	(Telecom)	\$93.4 B
9. Larry Page	(Google)	\$93.1 B
10. Steve Ballmer	(Microsoft)	\$91.6 B

[47]

A critical look at the list above will show that no women made the list of the first ten richest billionaires in the world. A sharp look at the top 10 richest women in the world including their net worth as of March 10, 2023, is shown below.

NAME	COMPANY/INDUS TRY	NETWORT H	SOURCE OF WEALTH
1. Françoise Bettencourt Meyers & family	L'Oréal cosmetics	\$80.5 Billion	Inherited her wealth from her mother
2. Julia Koch & family	Koch Industries	\$59 Billion	The widow of David Koch
3. Alice Walton	Walmart	\$56.7 Billion	She inherited a stake in Walmart from her father
4. Jacqueline Mars	Candy, pet food	\$38.3 Billion	The company was founded by her grandfather, Frank C. Mars, in 1911.
5. Miriam Adelson & family	Casinos	\$35 Billion	Inherited the stake from her husband, Sheldon Adelson, who died in 2021.

6. Rafaela Aponte-Diamant	Shipping	\$31.2 Billion	cofounded with her husband
7. Susanne Klatten	BMW, pharmaceuticals	\$27.4 Billion	Her mother was the third wife of legendary industrialist Herbert Quandt
8. Gina Rinehart	Mining	\$27 Billion	Inherited the business from her father Lang Hancock
9. MacKenzie Scott	Amazon	\$24.4 Billion	Inherited 4% of Amazon following her 2019 divorce from Jeff Bezos
10. Iris Fontbona & family	Mining	\$23.1 Billion	widow of Chilean tycoon Andrónico Luksic

[48]

A look at the list above showed that most of these female billionaires either got their wealth through inheritance, marriage, and or divorce. The question that needs an answer is what are the factors that have hindered women who by nature are multipliers from performing like their male counterparts in business. Some of these factors will be examined below.

FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Unavailability of easy access to funds, competition in the market; lack of access to the market, lack of access to raw material, lack of capital or finance, lack of marketing knowledge; lack of production/ storage space; poor infrastructure; inadequate power supply and lack of business training are some of the restraints against women in business.[49]

Access to finance is a key issue for women. Accessing credit, particularly for starting an enterprise, is one of the major constraints faced by women entrepreneurs. Women often have fewer opportunities than men to gain access to credit for various reasons, including lack of collateral, an unwillingness to accept household assets as collateral, and negative perceptions of female entrepreneurs by loan officers.

The ability to tap into new markets requires expertise, knowledge, and contacts. Women often lack access to training and experience in how to participate in the marketplace and are therefore unable to market goods and services strategically. Thus, women-owned SMEs are often unable to take on both the production and marketing of their goods. In addition, they have often not been exposed to the international market, and therefore lack knowledge about what is internationally acceptable. The high cost of developing new business contacts and relationships in a new country or

market is a big deterrent and obstacle for many SMEs, in particular women-owned businesses. Women may also fear or face prejudice or sexual harassment and may be restricted in their ability to travel to make contacts.[50]

Women also suffer from limited access to vocational and technical training compared to their male counterparts. Women on average have less access to education than men, as well as technical and vocational skills. Low enrolment among women in education, high dropout rates, and poor quality of education all put together affect the female gender.

Women have fewer business contacts, less knowledge of how to deal with the governmental bureaucracy, and less bargaining power, all of which further limit their growth. Since most women entrepreneurs operate on a small scale and are generally not members of professional organizations or part of other networks, they often find it difficult to access information. Most existing networks are male-dominated and sometimes not particularly welcoming to women but prefer to be exclusive. Even when a woman does venture into these networks, her task is often difficult because most network activities take place after regular working hours. There are hardly any women-only or women-majority networks where a woman could enter, gain confidence and move further. Lack of networks also deprives women of awareness and exposure to good role models. Few women are invited to join trade missions or delegations, due to the combined invisibility of women-dominated sectors or sub-sectors and women as individuals within any given sector. [51]

Women's lack of access to information also limits their knowledgeable input into policymaking. Other factors include; conflicting gender roles, lack of social acceptability; having limited contacts outside prejudice and class bias; society looking down upon others; attitude of other employees; relations with the workforce, etc.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined two key areas; the role of culture in business using examples of some ethnic groups such as the Japanese, Chinese, Jews, Igbo, and Indians. The work examined how their values, beliefs, socialization, and team spirit have helped in the economic growth of these distinct groups. The work also examined the role of religion in business growth and expansion. Emphasis was laid on Pentecostalism and Mouride. The impacts of these religions have seen the economic emancipation of members through a change in perception and beliefs which has kept some poor for years. Lastly, a critical analysis was carried out on gender and business. Some of the restraints that have kept the female gender below par with their male counterpart. The values, beliefs, shared ethics, and strong cooperative ties that have seen these distinct groups/countries rise to economic dominance can be imbibed on a local, national, and global scale to reduce drastically the poverty index of the world especially developing nations.

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