Book Review

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**Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys through
34 Nations, Clusters of Nations, Continents, & Diversity (6th edition)
by: Martin J. Gannon and Rajnandini K. Pillai
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Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys through 34 Nations, Clusters of Nations, Continents, & Diversity may seem a long and unwieldy title, but authors Gannon and Pillai hit upon a remarkably apt description of their work. To begin with, the promise of addressing culture at multiple geographical levels is well fulfilled. The authors explore within-nation cultural divides, as well as cultural characteristics at national and supranational levels. The title also cleverly employs an example of the very rhetorical device upon which the book is built. The metaphor of journeying through cultures, of exploring so as to understand them, is precisely how it feels to read this book.

The fundamental unit of the book is the cultural metaphor. The rhetorical purpose of a metaphor is to facilitate understanding of something new by comparing it to something known. Researchers in many domains recognise the utility of this device. For the purposes of cross-cultural management, the power of the metaphors in this book is even greater. These metaphors are not arbitrarily chosen as a means of best explaining a culture to others. Rather, the metaphor offered here for any given culture is built upon some activity or phenomenon with which the members of that culture identify, such as Finland's sauna or the United States' football. As such, the metaphors are directly tied to both the artefacts and the values of the culture and thus offer those unfamiliar with the country some quick yet useful insights into the priorities and beliefs of the members of that culture. And although the cultural metaphor is the primary vehicle for exploring each culture, the approach is well supported with its treatment of relevant historical and linguistic considerations. The chapter on Ireland is an example of this.

Teachers of cross-cultural management who are unfamiliar with the book in its previous editions will be delighted to find the authors truly do offer something different from other culture texts, in terms of the book's organisation, its content, and its philosophy. The book begins with an overview chapter that explains the concept and utility of cultural metaphors. Then, as in most culture texts, there is a useful summary of the standard cultural dimensions. This is the point where Gannon and Pillai depart from the usual formula. Rather than organising the book around the dimensions of culture and using country-specific examples to illustrate the extremes of each dichotomous concept, the authors explain their belief that a focus on the determinants of culture better serves

our understanding of each country's salient features. This leads to the use of the country as the focus of each chapter – almost like a travel guide. Each of the chapters addresses the country's cultural metaphor from a number of different angles, focusing in turn on different features of the metaphor. One of the most interesting ideas is that two countries can have the same cultural metaphor, embodied differently in each, as is the case with Spain and Portugal, where the metaphor of the bullfight is linked to different cultural artefacts and roots.

Cultural regions within nations are also addressed. In fact, countries characterised by such divisions are grouped together, which has an intriguing consequence: duality (or plurality) within a nation becomes itself a cultural feature. That the sub-national regions are explored via the same cultural metaphor reminds us of the cultural roots and commonalities that bind the whole of a nation together, rather than focusing on each sub-national region as a wholly distinct culture. The chapters on Vietnam and Italy provide two very different illustrations of countries with North-South cultural splits, yet strong underlying common values as well.

The individual countries' cultures are grouped into clusters of chapters, most having a common cultural theme. These groupings are not, however, the usual clusters, the commonalities among whose cultures are most often rooted in geography, language, or shared history. The countries regrouped by Gannon and Pillai share features such as having sharp cultural divisions or recent cultural upheavals, giving us such clusters as 'cleft national cultures' and 'torn national cultures,' respectively. Other clusters are based on commonalities in individualism – power distance pairings, giving us 'authority-ranking cultures' and 'market-pricing cultures', for example. There are still further clusters explored in the book, and the reader will quickly discover that the authors do not feel bound by a need to take a single systematic approach to comparing cultures.

Perhaps the greatest difference between Gannon and Pillai's work and other culture texts comes from its underlying philosophy. At its heart, their approach suggests that we can and should compare apples to oranges – that, in fact, imposing artificially uniform dimensions on comparative cultural analysis is akin to describing an orange in terms of its not-apple-ness; it adds nothing to our understanding of the orange. Exploring and describing a culture within a fitting cultural metaphor allows us to focus on what is unique and salient to the culture. Similarly, using diverse unifying elements permits us to create clusters of countries with meaningful commonalities beyond simply language or geographic region.

The book might appeal less to readers seeking a tool for macro-level research, as eschewing the systematic application of the standard dimensions of culture is an approach that certainly complicates both descriptive and comparative analysis. On the other hand, it does not privilege one type of analysis at the expense of the other, the way the use of cultural dimensions and measures of distance for the sake of comparative analysis do. While the complexity of the cultural metaphor approach renders both measurement and quantitative analysis difficult (or impossible), it provides rich and nuanced insight into the individual countries as well as the cultural clusters. It is thus a great text for courses in cross-cultural management, and equally a useful for tool for anyone wishing to prepare for an experience in a new culture.