Cultural norm in our community

In some countries, women are expected to cover themselves from head to toe. In others, bikini bottoms are plenty sufficient. In some places, baskets are carried in the arms. In others, they are placed on the head. Behind it what on earth control our behavior and conduct our life? That is cultural norm. So, what is culture? In the words of E.B. Tylor, "Culture is complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." And cultural norms are the standards we live by. They are the shared expectations and rules that guide behavior of people within social groups. Cultural norms are learned and reinforced from parents, friends, teachers and others while growing up in a society. We can see that cultural norms are different all across the world, and are often discussed about in our society today.

Where values are general guidelines for behavior, norms represent very specific rules that govern behavior in particular situations. Furthermore, norms cultivate reliable guidelines for daily living and contribute to the health and well-being of a culture. They act as prescriptions for correct and moral behavior, lend meaning and coherence to life, and provide a means to achieve a sense of integrity, safety and belonging. These normative beliefs, together with related cultural values and rituals, presents a sense of order and control upon aspects of life that might otherwise appear chaotic or unpredictable.

Similar to the associated concept of values, norms differ from individual to individual and society to society. However, cultural norm in the community also have the same rules and customs to conduct our life. China is a country with long history and abundant culture. It is generally acknowledge that Chinese people are reserved and conservative. Let me cite a few by way of illustration. At festivals, when we receive gift from our friends or families, it’s not advisable to open it immediately for it is considered impolite behavior and leaves bad impression on others. When we visit our relatives, it is recommended that we bring gift for them. It is the matter of customs and also a way to show our love and friendness. At school, we ought to say hello to teachers when we run into teachers. And don’t forget to add honorific title with the surname, instead of calling someone’s name directly. Although it’s a correct way of calling foreign professors’ name directly. As is known to all, “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” It states that cultural norm plays a significant role in our life and involved in every aspects of our life.

I still remember there existed some conflicts when I was with one of my foreign friends, Andrew. Due to different culture of different countries, we have tremendous difference in cultural norm. Last summer holiday, I finished my task and was about to visit him in Shenzhen. In order to give him a surprise, I did not tell him before the trip. I stayed beside his apartment and waited for him. When he was ready to go out, I came up and was ready to give a surprise. However, he saw me with a confused look and was apparently unpleased, “What are you doing here?” “Oh, come on, I come to see you, is it surprising?” “Yep, but you should call me first before you come to see me.” “So are you mad at me?” “A little bit maybe, but don’t do it again, ok?” Such an idiot! Only at that time did I realize how much important it is to be aware of other countries’ culture. He is from America, a country in a hurry pace. Thus, they want to be informed when others come on a visit because it can avoid time clash and not impede their process. However, it is quite different in China. It would be acceptable if you visit someone without notification. We would be much happier with such a surprise. Here is another example, when I was with my foreign boyfriend, I realize we have a lot of difference between our cultures. In China, if we have feeling for someone and ask him/her out. Meanwhile, both hold hands, kiss or even hug, which are all signs of couples. However, in western countries, even someone kiss you, or have sex with you, you may not be couples. You might think it ridiculous, but it’s just a matter of cultural norm. Therefore, in china it would be offensive to touch someone if you are not ready in relationship.

As we can see, social norms vary between countries and from social class to social class and from social group to social group. Each group can share many of the same social norms; and, the group may have a few special norms. As you move from country to country and group to group it is up to you to know, and implement, the appropriate social norms. That people are influenced by the social environment and behaviors of the others around them, which later causes them to adjust their own behaviors to fit in with that specific culture or social group. Or some cultures force you to conform to their norms, it may be enforced by your parents or friends, etc.