

Introduction

In trying to learn about another culture, observers often tend to record what is most striking or interesting in their encounters with the new culture. Often, observations tend to focus on what is novel and different—aspects of culture that do not resemble the familiar from one's own culture and experience. Consider a recent trip that you may have taken to other countries or places within the United States. What do you tend to record with your camera or in your travel journal? Do you see any tendency towards recording the unfamiliar and unusual from your own experiences with new cultures or locations?

The Perry mission's encounter with Japan was especially rich in visual records, partly due to the work of a young artist—William Heine—who was commissioned to accompany the voyage specifically to illustrate the journey and its findings. On the other hand, the Japanese, taken by surprise by the American mission, may not have had an officially designated visual recorder, but they had many people taking on the task of recording this historic event, for a variety of reasons.

Among the rich visual records of the Perry embassy to Japan are several very long painted scrolls undertaken by Japanese artists and known collectively as the Black Ship Scrolls. Illustrated scrolls were already a well-established tradition by the time Perry arrived in Japan. Scrolls narrated stories in words and pictures as they unrolled from right to left. One of these Black Ship Scrolls is reproduced on the *Black Ships and Samurai* Web site and this activity will focus on that scroll.

The Universals of Culture

The "Universals of Culture" are a conceptual tool for the study of cultures. These "universals" are functions that culture serves and that are found in some form in every culture on earth. The following categories make up our list of the universals of culture:

I. Material Culture

- A. Food
- B. Clothing and Adornment of the Body
- C. Tools and Weapons
- D. Housing and Shelter
- E. Transportation
- F. Personal Possessions
- G. Household Articles

II. The Arts, Play, and Recreation

- A. Forms of the Arts, Play, and Recreation
- B. Folk Arts and Fine Arts
- C. Standards of Beauty and Taste

III. Language and Nonverbal Communication

- A. Nonverbal Communication
- B. Language

IV. Social Organization

- A. Societies
- B. Families
- C. Kinship Systems

V. Social Control

- A. Systems and Governmental Institutions
- B. Rewards and Punishments

VI. Conflict and Warfare

- A. Kinds of Conflict
- B. Kinds of Warfare

VII. Economic Organization

- A. Systems of Trade and Exchange
- B. Producing and Manufacturing
- C. Property
- D. Division of Labor
- E. Standard of Living

VIII. Education

- A. Informal Education
- B. Formal Education

IX. World View

- A. Belief Systems
- B. Religion

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