

### UNIT THREE: CULTURAL PATTERNS AND PROCESSES

If you have ever studied the earth's surface from an airplane thousands of feet in the air, you have observed the **cultural landscape**, the modification of the natural landscape by human activities. From the air, you get a whole new perspective on mountains, deserts, and rivers, but you also notice the many dramatic ways that people alter the land. For example, flying over the Midwestern United States you see the "checkerboards" created by intersections of crops, fields, and woods. Many times roads that lead to houses and barns mark borders. Cities, too, are impressive examples of the human imprint, with their large downtown buildings connected by road systems to the sprawling suburbs that surround them. The transformation of the land and the ways that humans interact with the environment are the special interests of **cultural geography**, an important component of the human geography course. **Cultural ecology** is the field that studies the relationship between the natural environment and culture. The cultural landscape provides ready evidence that humans transform and adapt to the land, and it offers clues about the cultural practices and priorities of its inhabitants, both present and past.



**Cultural Landscape in Peru.** This view of the Sacred Valley near Cuzco reflects cultural adaptation to the natural environment of mountain valleys. The human imprint is apparent not only in the town that is built in the flat part of the valley, but also in the surrounding agricultural fields, which are carved both into the valley and up the mountainsides as terraces.

## SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Through the years, cultural geographers have developed many different perspectives on the spatial interaction between humans and the land. These perspectives may be divided into four schools of thought: environmental determinism, possibilism, environmental perception, and humans as modifiers of the earth.

- **Environmental determinism** – Geographers who adhere to environmental determinism believe that the physical environment, especially the climate and terrain, actively shapes cultures, so that human responses are almost completely molded by the environment. Logically, then, similar physical environments produce similar cultures. Mountain cultures are simple, backward, and freedom-loving, and people who live near coasts center their activities on fishing and navigating the oceans or rivers. Temperate climates produce inventive, industrious, and democratic societies that are most likely to control others. Environmental determinism was popular during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially among English-speaking geographers who used their perspective to explain why Britain came to dominate the globe.
- **Possibilism** – Possibilists recognize the importance of the physical environment, but they believe that cultural heritage is at least as important as the physical environment in shaping human behavior. People, then, are the primary architects of culture, and any physical environment offers many possibilities for a culture to develop. People make choices based on the opportunities and limitations of the physical environment, but their choices are also guided by cultural heritage. Most possibilists believe that technology increases the number of possibilities a people have, so that technologically advanced cultures have more control over their physical surroundings.
- **Environmental perception** – Whereas possibilism describes humans as making choices within the setting of their physical environment, environmental perception emphasizes the importance of human perception of the environment, rather than the actual character of the land. Perception, in turn, is shaped by the teachings of culture. For example, culture shapes our views of hazards and disasters, and human reactions will vary, depending on their cultural beliefs and values. For example, if people believe that a devastating flood was caused by the displeasure of the gods, they likely respond by building an altar, or by some other action intended to placate the gods. On the other hand, if people believe that the flood was a natural disaster, they most likely react by trying to prevent future floods, perhaps by building a dam.
- **Cultural determinism** – This perspective emphasizes human culture as ultimately more important than physical environment in shaping human actions. In contrast to environmental determinism, the humans-as-modifiers approach views human culture as the molder of the physical environment. Some cultural determinists have seen humans in opposition to nature, and if nature is not controlled, humans are destined to die. Others have emphasized the negative impact that humans have had on the environment, and have urged people to take action to alter their impact. For example, modern movements to “take back the earth” encourage action to reverse global warming, air and water pollution, or the destruction of rain forests.

## CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

**Culture** is the complex mix of values, beliefs, behaviors, and material objects that together form a people's way of life. Most social scientists are interested in the study of culture, but geographers specialize in the ways that culture affects the natural environment, as well as the spatial organization that culture stimulates. Culture may be divided into two types:

- **Non-material culture** – This type of culture consists of *abstract* concepts of values, beliefs, and behaviors. **Values** are culturally-defined standards that guide the way people assess desirability, goodness, and beauty, and that serve as guidelines for moral living. For example, one culture may consider body piercing to be an enhancement of human beauty. Other cultures may see it as a distortion of human appearance. On a broader level, one culture may emphasize the importance of abiding by the wishes of a supreme being, while another culture may extol the ability of human beings to set their own parameters. **Beliefs** are specific statements that people hold to be true, and they are almost always based on values. For example, the broad value that humans are able to guide their own lives may encourage a more specific belief in a democratic government that allows people to exercise their abilities. **Behaviors**, or actions that people take, are generally based on values and beliefs as reflected in **norms**, the rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members.
- **Material culture** – This type of culture includes a wide range of concrete human creations called **artifacts**, which reflect values, beliefs, and behaviors. You can readily see material culture as it relates to the environment from an airplane – the roads, houses, buildings, cars, farm equipment, and airport runways. But look beyond the objects themselves. Why do people build houses? Why are the houses arranged in the patterns that you see? Why are the checkerboards arranged as they are, and where do the roads lead? The answers to these questions lie in the values, beliefs, and behaviors (non-material culture) that humans use to guide the creation and maintenance of their artifacts (material culture).

## CULTURE REGIONS, TRAITS, AND COMPLEXES

Separating culture into non-material and material types helps to sort out its complexities. Culture ties directly to geography's emphasis on space with the concept of a **culture region**, an area marked by culture that distinguishes it from other regions. Non-material culture, such as clothing and building style, reflect the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the people that live in the region. A single attribute of a culture is called a **culture trait**, and a culture region consists of countless numbers of traits. For example, a trait may be the practice of wearing colorful clothing with the group's own skillful weave and design. Another culture trait may be the building of roads and bridges across mountain ranges. Yet another trait may be the construction of buildings without mortar, and another the terracing of land for crop growth. Put all of these – and thousands of others – together, and you may study the culture region that survives today around the Andes Mountains in South America.

Culture traits are not necessarily confined to a single culture. For example, people in many cultures use brushes to clean their teeth and to make their hair more attractive, and they usually use different kinds of brushes for the two types of activities. However, the trait combines with others in a distinctive way,

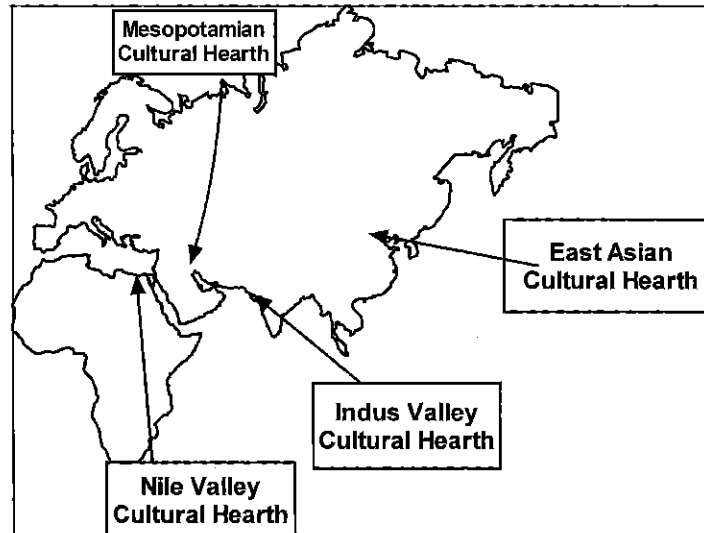


**Material culture, past and present.** The adaptability of human material culture is evident in this photo of a modern-day French village. The narrow streets were built in an earlier time when people traveled by foot, animal, or wagon. The motorcycle parked by its owner's door is a reflection of modern technology's adaptation to material culture (winding streets, houses without garages) from the past.

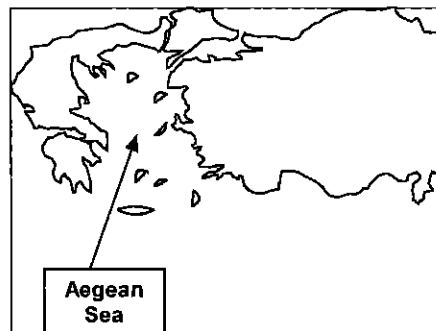
so that a **culture complex** is formed. A culture complex consists of common values, beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts that make a group in an area distinct from others. For example, a large country such as China has many culture complexes. One complex that surrounds the modern city of Xi'an combines religions and beliefs, such as Buddhism, Islam, and Confucianism, in a way that makes it identifiable as a separate culture complex. However, particular traits, such as following Confucian principles, are shared by other complexes around them. Any area with strong cultural ties that binds its people together forms a **culture system**, a group of interconnected culture complexes. On the map, a culture region can represent an entire culture system that intertwines with its locational and environmental circumstances to form a **geographic region**.

### CULTURAL HEARTHES

Historians specialize in the identification of **cultural hearths**, the areas where civilizations first began that radiated the customs, innovations, and ideologies that culturally transformed the world. Early cultural hearths developed in Southwest Asia, North Africa, South Asia, and East Asia in the valleys and basin of great river systems. Cultural hearths evolved later in Central and South America, and their geography shaped cultural development not around river valleys, but around mountain ranges and central highlands. Another cultural hearth with its own culture complex developed centuries later in West Africa, very much influenced by earlier hearths along the Nile River in Northeast Africa. Another unique cultural hearth developed in the islands of the Aegean Sea, where the inhabitants were joined by easy water access among islands and mainlands.



**Earliest Cultural Hearths.** The earliest cultural hearths were almost completely determined by their geographical locations. All were in river valleys where the soil was the most fertile and water most available for growing crops and transportation.



**Early Aegean Cultural Hearth.** This cultural hearth differed from earlier hearths in that it centered on the Aegean Sea, not on a river valley. The sea is calm and the islands numerous, allowing for easy transportation for Ancient Greeks to trade for goods that their natural environment did not provide.

From their centers, the hearths grew until they came into contact with one another, although their inhabitants' ability to travel to and contact other cultural hearths was limited by their levels of technology and by distance. Cultural hearths have shifted greatly over time. For example, the Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century shifted cultural hearths to Europe and North America, with modern shifts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continuing to occur.

## CULTURAL DIFFUSION

The early cultural hearths were centers for innovation and invention, and their non-material and material culture spread to areas around them through a process called **cultural diffusion**. Over time, as cultural hearths have shifted, cultural diffusion has spread cultural traits to most parts of the globe. This long and complicated spread of culture often makes it difficult to trace the origin, spread, and timing of a particular trait. Whenever it is possible, developments that can be traced to a specific civilization are known as **independent inventions**. For example, the democratic process of gathering assemblies to discuss and vote on issues is often seen as an independent invention of the Ancient Greeks.

Diffusion occurs through the movement of people, goods, and ideas. **Carl Sauer** focused on this process in *Agricultural Origins and Dispersals*, written in 1952. Another famous geographer that wrote about

cultural diffusion about the same time was **Torsten Hagerstrand**. Since the time of these pioneers, geographers have classified diffusion processes into two broad categories:

- **Expansion diffusion** – This type of diffusion is said to occur when an innovation or idea develops in a source area and remains strong there while also spreading outward. One form of expansion diffusion is **contagious diffusion**, when almost all individuals and areas outward from the source region are affected. The term implies the importance of direct contact between those in the source region and those in outlying areas, much as a contagious disease requires contact between those that have the disease and those that don't. The rate of diffusion is influenced by **time-distance decay**, so that the influence of the cultural traits weakens as time and distance increase. Another type of expansion diffusion is **hierarchical diffusion**, where ideas and artifacts spread first between larger places or prominent people and only later to smaller places or less prominent people. For example, as Islam spread to Sub-Saharan Africa by the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E., its first converts were the elites, so that for centuries the kings and nobility were Muslim, but their subjects usually retained native religions, and only later converted to Islam. A third form of expansion diffusion is **stimulus diffusion** in which a basic idea, though not the specific trait itself, stimulates imitative behavior within a population. The idea may be too vague, different, or unattainable to be readily adopted by the new area. However, this does not mean that the idea has no impact at all. For example, as Buddhism spread from the main continent of Asia to Japan, the Japanese imitated designs for Buddhist temples, but interpretations of colors were often transmitted by verbal or written descriptions, not by someone who had actually seen a temple on the mainland. As a result, even today many Japanese temples are trimmed in bright orange, not the more traditional red seen in China.
- **Relocation diffusion** – In this process of diffusion, individuals or populations migrating from the source areas physically carry the innovation or idea to new areas. For example, Christian Europeans carried their faith to the Americas, where they often actively set about converting natives to Christianity, especially in Latin America. As a result, Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Western Hemisphere, ensuring its status as a major world religion. On a smaller scale, later immigrants to the United States carried their customs along to contained areas of settlement. A particular form of relocation diffusion is **migrant diffusion**, where the spread of cultural traits is slow enough that they weaken in the area of origin by the time they reach other areas. Examples are the contagious diseases that spread rapidly through the Native American populations that came into contact with Europeans in the New World during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Immunities were built up so that the diseases faded in Europe at the same time they were raging in the Americas.

## ACCULTURATION

When cultures come into contact, one culture often dominates the other. In the process called **acculturation**, the less dominant culture adopts some of the traits of the more influential one. Acculturation typically takes place when immigrants take on the values, attitudes, customs, and language of their new country. The dominant country is usually changed by this process as well. For example, in the United States today, years of migration from Latin America have led to the custom of adding Spanish

to signs, phone recordings, and even government forms that had previously only appeared in English. If over time, the immigrants lose their native customs, including religion and language, **assimilation** occurs, meaning that the dominant culture completely absorbs the less dominant one. Assimilation sometimes occurs over the course of several generations, so that those that immigrate do not become fully assimilated, but their children or grandchildren do.

Sometimes two-way flows of culture reflect a more equal exchange of cultural traits, a process called **transculturation**. For example, as Buddhism spread from its origins in India throughout Asia, many of those that came in contact with the new religion already were steeped in the philosophical beliefs of Confucianism. Both forces were strong, and they clashed fiercely, but eventually transculturation occurred, and both Buddhism and Confucianism remained in place to influence large populations throughout the broad expanse of East Asia.

## ETHNOCENTRISM AND CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Because culture interacts with the physical environment to shape human values and actions, almost all people exhibit **ethnocentrism**, the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture. Some ethnocentrism is necessary for people to be emotionally attached to their way of life, but ethnocentrism also generates misunderstanding and sometimes conflict. If one culture considers itself to be superior to others, the basis is laid for taking over other lands or for killing people or destroying property. Ethnocentrism takes many less harmful forms, and it is reflected even in our language. For example, people in Europe and North America have often referred to China as the "Far East" (a term that is unknown to the Chinese) because China is far east of Europeans and North Americans. On the other hand, the Chinese historically have referred to their land as the "Middle Kingdom" because it is in the center of the world.

In contrast to ethnocentrism, **cultural relativism** is the practice of evaluating a culture by its own standards. To practice cultural relativism, a person would have to put aside his or her own cultural preferences and consider another culture based on its own people's needs and values. Cultural relativists argue that in the modern world where people come into increased contact with one another, the importance of understanding other cultures becomes ever greater. Critics of cultural relativism point out problems that come with accepting all actions and values as equal, leading an individual to ignore or dismiss those that are clearly harmful or unjust.

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When cultural traits diffuse from society to society, they commonly go through various alterations. Rarely do they arrive completely intact, largely because the new group will adapt them to meet their needs, or interpret them according to their beliefs and values. The process of the fusion of old and new is called **syncretism**, a major explanation for how and why cultural changes occur. These changes inevitably lead to wide cultural differences in many areas, including languages and religions. Broad cultural differences between culture complexes and regions lead to varying ethnic identities, as well as to contrasting expectations for the roles that men and women play in society.

## LANGUAGE

Language is the key to the world of culture. No other single culture trait more commonly binds people together because language is a set of symbols that allow people to communicate with one another. Over time, humans have devised hundreds of alphabets. Even the basic rules for writing differ. For example, most people in Western societies write from left to right, but people in Northern Africa and Western Asia write right to left, and people in Eastern Asia write from top to bottom.

**Language** is a systematic means of communicating ideas and feelings through the use of signs, gestures, marks, or vocal sounds. Language not only allows for communication, but it ensures the continuity of culture, or **cultural transmission**, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next. Without language, the accumulated wisdom of previous generations would be much more difficult to pass on to children. Every society transmits culture through speech, and most today also pass it along through writing as well. The preservation of culture is much more likely if at least some of a society's members can read and write because written records often last long after they are created. Writing was invented some 5,000 years ago, although until the 20<sup>th</sup> century most ordinary people were illiterate. Today high-income nations are nearly universally literate, and literacy rates are increasing in most other countries of the world.

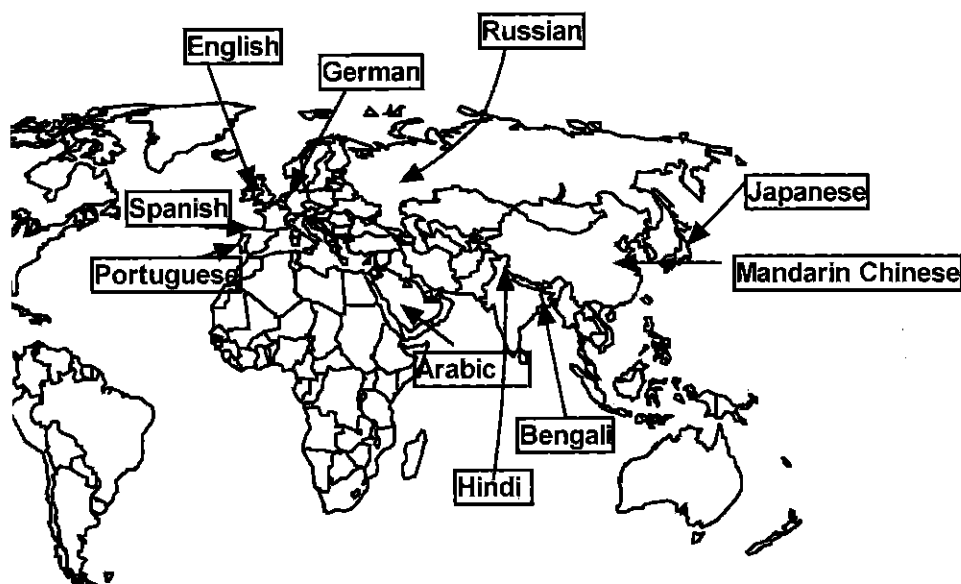
Linguists estimate that between 5,000 and 6,000 languages are in use in the world today, with some much more widely used than others. Only ten languages are spoken by at least 100 million people: Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, German, Mandarin and Wu Chinese, English, Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, and Japanese. These most commonly spoken languages have diffused from their origins in many ways, including through trade, conquests, and/or migrations. Some areas of the world are characterized by **linguistic fragmentation**, a condition in which many languages are spoken, each by a relatively small number of people. This condition may result in an area where many major languages have diffused or where people have existed in relative isolation from others. An example is the Caucasus region of Eastern Europe, where many different cultural groups have settled and retained their languages. Today several thousand languages are spoken by fewer than 2 million people.

### THE TEN MOST COMMONLY SPOKEN LANGUAGES (Percentages for first language speakers only)

<b>Mandarin Chinese</b>	<b>12.44 %</b>
<b>Spanish</b>	<b>4.85%</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>4.83%</b>
<b>Arabic</b>	<b>3.25%</b>
<b>Hindi</b>	<b>2.68%</b>
<b>Bengali</b>	<b>2.66%</b>
<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>2.62%</b>
<b>Russian</b>	<b>2.12%</b>
<b>Japanese</b>	<b>1.8%</b>
<b>Standard German</b>	<b>1.33%</b>

Source: The CIA Factbook, 2009 estimates





**Sources of Ten Major World Languages.** Although there are thousands of languages spoken today, the majority of people in the world speak one of the languages indicated on the map. The map shows the origins of these languages before they diffused to many other areas of the world.

### Language Families, Languages, and Dialects

How we define language depends on society's view of what makes up a cultural community, so the distinctions between language families, languages, and dialects are far from clear. However, each category represents a difference of scale, with language families having the broadest global perspective and dialects representing local variations of a language. **Linguistic geography** is the study of speech areas and their local variations by mapping word choices, pronunciations, or grammatical constructions.

- **Language families** – Languages are usually grouped into families with a shared, but fairly distant origin. The most commonly cited is the **Indo-European family**, since languages in this family are spoken by about half the world's people, with English as the most widely used. Other Indo-European languages include Spanish, English, Hindi, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, German, Marathi, French, Italian, Punjabi, and Urdu, accounting for over 1.7 billion native speakers. Romance languages form a **sub-family**, with origins in Latin, including Spanish, French, and Italian. The distant origins of the Indo-European family are thought to be in the vicinity of the Black Sea where speakers of a root language dispersed all over Europe and Central Asia, spreading their language that changed as it diffused, eventually evolving into distinct languages. Some analysts suggest that these inhabitants swept westward on horseback and conquered earlier inhabitants. Others believe that it was the spread of agriculture, not conquest, that was responsible for diffusing the Indo-European root language throughout Europe and Central Asia. Other language families include Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Dravidian, and American Indian, and scholars propose that they too diffused from cultural hearths long ago.
- **Languages** – Languages are culturally defined, with **standard languages** those that are recognized by the government and the intellectual elite as the norm for use in schools, government, media, and other aspects of public life. Standard languages are often the

dialects identified with countries' capital cities or centers of power at the time the nations developed. For example, standard French is based on the dialect of Paris, which in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century began to dominate the land space that eventually became France. In China, standard Chinese is Mandarin Chinese heard in and around the capital, Beijing. However, many other versions of the language are spoken, including Wu Chinese, which is spoken in Shanghai and many other major cities south of Beijing. Sometimes, especially in multilingual states, a standard language may be designated as an **official language**, or the language endorsed and recognized by the government as the one that everyone should know and use. Countries may designate more than one official language, especially if linguistically distinct groups lobby the government for recognition of their languages.

- **Dialects** – On the sub-national scale, dialects may be thought of as regional variants of a standard language. Although most people in the country may understand the standard language, they speak with differences in vocabulary, and they put words together in phrases in different ways. Also, pronunciations vary, and people in some areas speak more quickly or slowly than people in other areas. An accent reveals almost anyone's regional home. Linguistic geographers map the area in which particular words are used, marking their limits as **isoglosses**, boundaries within which the words are spoken. An isogloss is not a clear line of demarcation, however, with the use of particular words fading as the boundary is approached. Major languages that have diffused widely from their origins often have hundreds of dialects. For example, on the world level British, American, Indian, and Australian English are all distinctive dialects. Regionally, in Britain alone, dialects may be grouped in three ways: Southern British English, Northern British English, and Scottish English, each containing several more localized variations. Dialect regions in the eastern United States may be divided into the North (New England and adjacent Canada extending to a secondary dialect area centered in New York City), the Midland (central New Jersey to central Delaware, spreading extensively across the interior of the United States and Canada), and the South (East Coast from Chesapeake Bay south). Dozens of other dialects exist in the mid-section and along the West Coast.

### Coping with Language Barriers

People from different language groups are often quite creative in trying to communicate, even though their native tongues are mutually incomprehensible. **Bilingualism** (the ability to communicate in two languages) and **multilingualism** (the ability to communicate in more than two languages) may permit one person to speak the common language, or both to switch to a jointly understood third language. However, long-term contact between less skilled people sometimes results in the creation of a **pidgin**, an amalgamation of languages that borrows words from several. A pidgin is a hybrid that serves as a second language for everyone who uses it. For example, Lingala is a hybrid of Congolese dialects that the French invented to aid in communication among some 270 ethnic groups. If a pidgin becomes the first language of a group of speakers – who may have lost their former native tongue through disuse – a **creole** has evolved. An example is Haitian Creole, the language of Haiti, derived from pidginized French used in the slave trade.

An established language that comes to be spoken and understood over a large area is sometimes called a **lingua franca**, named after a medieval dialect of France spoken by Crusaders from various European



**The modern area around the Mediterranean Sea.** Most of the area around the Mediterranean Sea was dominated by the Roman Empire by the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. As political power spread, Latin became the *lingua franca* of the area. Once the empire fell, the area reverted to cultural practices of its various ethnicities, as reflected in the country and city names on the modern map. However, Latin blended with native tongues to create modern languages of Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, and Portuguese.

countries as they pursued their quest to recapture the Holy Lands from the Turks. After the Crusades were over the language remained useful in the regions around the eastern Mediterranean Sea to facilitate trade and travel. Many years earlier, between 300 B.C.E. and 500 C.E., the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean was Greek, which was later replaced by Latin, the Roman language. Latin became the standard language of the entire Roman Empire, which stretched from Britain in the Northwest to lands far east of the Mediterranean. After the fall of the empire, people became isolated from one another and reverted to speaking their individual dialects that had never disappeared entirely, and Latin became a “dead” language. However, even though it did not survive as a major language, its influence is still seen in the development of the “Romance languages” that combined local dialects with Latin to create major modern languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish.

Today an important example of a *lingua franca* is English, which has become a language of international communication. The rapid growth in importance of English is reflected in the large number of students learning English as a second language in schools in many countries around the world. Some 200 million people speak English fluently as a second language, and countless others have some working knowledge of the language. Other than English, modern *lingua franca* languages include Swahili in East Africa, Hindustani in South Asia, and Russian in the former Soviet Union.

## Toponymy

**Toponymy** is the study of place names, a special interest of linguistic geography. Place names become a part of the cultural landscape that remains long after the name givers have disappeared from the scene. In the United States, a classic study of toponymy is George Stewart’s *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States*. A careful study of a map can reveal cultural identities and histories by simply noticing names of geographical and political features. For example, many names honor kings, queens, or heroes, such as “Maryland” for Queen Mary, “Virginia” for the Virgin Queen Elizabeth, “Carolina” and “Georgia” for English kings Charles and George. Other names reflect geographical origins: “York” (New York), the “Jersey Isles” (New Jersey), and “Hampshire”

(New Hampshire). Localized or temporary settlements, such as the Dutch around New York Harbor, live on in their place names, “Breukelyn” (Brooklyn) and “Haarlem” (Harlem). Some place names are simply descriptive (“Rocky Mountains,” “Salt Lake City”), and others denote incidents or events (“Battle Creek,” Michigan) or commemorate religious figures (“San Francisco,” “St. Louis”). In Canada, French ethnicity is reflected in place names in Quebec: “Trois-Rivieres,” “Grand Mère,” “Chateau-Richer,” “Montreal,” and “Quebec.”

Many place names have two or more parts. For example, names often contain the word “town,” “ton,” “burgh,” or “ville” (all references to a town) and a person (“Johnstown,” “Pottstown,” “Youngstown,” “Charleston,” “Princeton,” “Pittsburgh,” “Knoxville,” “Nashville”). Other two part names use prefixes, such as “new,” “big,” or “little,” that appear in many languages. An example is “Big River” in English, which is found as “Rio Grande” in Spanish, and “Mississippi” in Algonquin.

### Language Extinction

**Extinct languages** were once in use, but are no longer spoken or read in daily activities by anyone in the world. The process of extinction no doubt has been going on throughout history and prehistory, but it seems to be accelerating as communication and transportation improvements bring world languages to most parts of the globe. An example of an extinct language is Gothic, widely spoken by people in Eastern and Northern Europe during the 3rd century C.E. The entire language family that Gothic originated from has disappeared, with the latest speakers of Gothic dying out in the Crimean area of Russia during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Some organizations are trying to preserve endangered languages, as evidenced by the European Union’s European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, which provides financial support, especially to Celtic languages. Ethnic groups have also pushed for measures to preserve their languages, such as the movement in Wales to continue to teach Welsh, not just English, in their schools. In modern day Peru about 3 to 4 million people speak the native language Quechua, with a few others in Bolivia and Ecuador. Spanish has been the dominant language of these countries since the Spanish conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Quechua has been in slow decline, spoken mainly in rural areas. However, in recent days two members of Peru’s Congress have insisted on delivering their speeches in Quechua, so that the legislature has been forced to hire translators. On an international level, Google has launched a version of its search engine in Quechua, and Microsoft has provided Quechua translations of its Windows and Office programs. In 2006 Peru’s president signed a law making discrimination on the basis of language a criminal offence.

### RELIGION

Unlike language, which is important in all cultures, religion varies in its cultural influence. Historically, almost all cultures have centered on religion, and today many still do. However, in recent years other ideologies have replaced religion as key cultural components in some societies. One such ideology is **humanism**, with roots in Ancient Greece and Rome (and more recently the European Renaissance), which emphasizes the ability of human beings to guide their own lives. Another is **Marxism**, which transformed communism into a central ideology in many areas during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, even in societies that are largely non-religious, people are strongly influenced by religious values from earlier days.

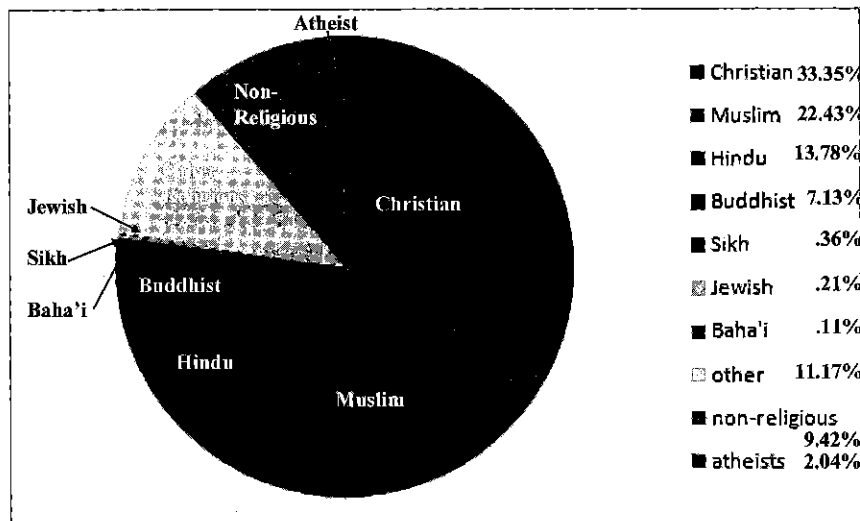
Religion distinguishes itself from other belief systems by its emphasis on the sacred and divine. According to French sociologist Emile Durkheim, religion is important in explaining anything that surpasses the limits of our knowledge. As human beings, we define most objects, events, and experiences as **profane**, or ordinary, but we define some things as **sacred**, or extraordinary, inspiring a sense of awe and reverence. Religions usually explain the relationship of the individual to the world, as well as the meaning of life and death, and what happens to people after they die. These beliefs become intertwined with other values, beliefs, and customs of the society so that they become basic to a people's way of life. For example, almost since its founding Islam has been the basis for *shari'a* law that defines the political systems of many Muslim countries.

Geographers are interested in religion because it shapes the cultural landscape, with predominant religions varying among regions of the world. Geographers document the places where various religions are located and offer explanations as to why some religions have diffused globally, whereas others have remained highly localized.

### Universalizing Religions

The three main **universalizing religions** are Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Each attempts to be global in its appeal to all people, wherever they may live in the world, not just to those in one location. They contrast to **ethnic religions** that appeal primarily to one group of people living in one place. About 60% of the world's population identifies with a universalizing religion, 24% to an ethnic religion, and about 16% to no religion. Each of the three universalizing religions is divided into subgroups:

- **Branches** are large and basic divisions within a religion.
- **Denominations** are divisions of branches that unite local groups in a single administrative body.
- **Sects** are relatively small groups that do not affiliate with the more mainstream denominations.



**Major Religions of the World as a Percentage of World Population.** Although there are many different religions in the world, most people that call themselves religious adhere to the few religions identified on the chart. More than 60% of the world's population identifies with one of the three universalizing religions: Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. The largest single ethnic religion is Hinduism, with nearly 14% of the world's population, mostly located on the Indian subcontinent.

## Christianity

Christianity has by far the most followers, with about 2.3 billion people worldwide calling themselves Christians. It also has the most widespread distribution, and it is the predominant religion in North America, South America, Europe, and Australia. Christianity has three major branches:

- **Roman Catholic** – About 50% of the world’s Christians are Roman Catholic, with concentrations in Latin America, French Canada (Quebec), Central Africa, and Southern and Eastern Europe.
- **Protestant** – About 18% of the world’s Christians are Protestants. This branch first split from the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it later divided into hundreds of denominations. Protestantism is strong in North America, Northern Europe, Britain, South Africa, and Australia.
- **Eastern Orthodox** – About 12% of all Christians are Eastern Orthodox, a branch that officially split from Roman Catholicism in the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. It is strong in Eastern Europe and Russia.

Other Christians affiliate with a variety of African, Asian, and Latin American churches that cannot be categorized with the three major branches. Many communities were isolated from others at an early point in the development of the religion, but have remained Christian over the centuries. Examples are the Ethiopian Church, with about 10 million followers, and the Coptic Church of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Eritrea with about 50 million adherents.

More than one-half of U.S. adults consider themselves Protestants and one-fourth identify as Catholics. Only about 4% – according to an ABC news poll in 2011 – identify as adherents to a non-Christian religion – Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and a smattering of others. Although the diversity of Protestant denominations is great, regional differences mean that most people live in communities where one denomination predominates. For example, Baptists prevail in the southern states from Texas east to Virginia and Georgia. Many Methodists live in the Northeast and the Southwest, and Lutherans concentrate in Minnesota and North Dakota. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) live mainly in the state

### **PROTESTANTISM IN THE UNITED STATES** (as a percentage of total population)

<b>Baptist Church</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Methodist Church</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Pentecostal Church</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Lutheran Church</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Presbyterian Church</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Episcopalian Church</b>	<b>1%</b>

**Christianity in the United States.** About 50% of the U.S. population is Protestant, but they belong to hundreds of different denominations and sects. Even the major denominations above are divided into different churches. For example, Baptists are divided into Southern Baptists, Northern Baptists, National Baptists, National Missionary Baptists, and Progressive National Baptists. Many Protestants belong to independent denominations that do not affiliate with the major groups listed above.

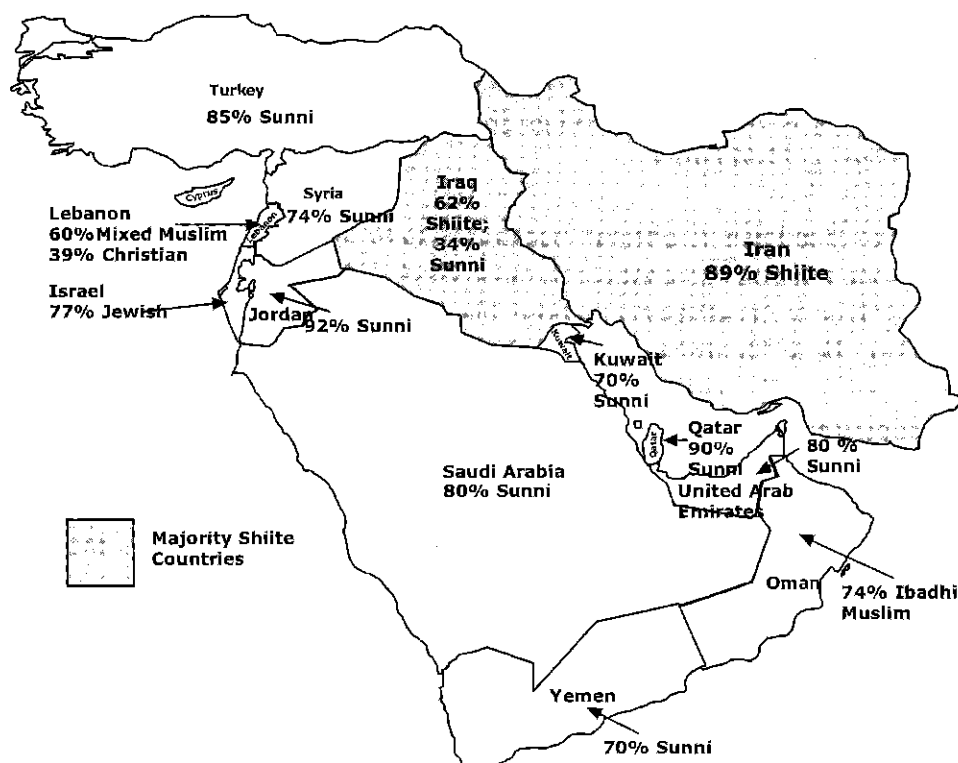
of Utah and its surrounding areas. These patterns are determined partly by movements of people in history. For example, Mormons traveled to Utah to escape religious persecution in the east, and immigrants from Scandinavia brought their Lutheran religion with them to the northern part of the Midwest.

## Islam

The second largest world religion is Islam, with about 1.6 billion adherents. It is the predominant religion of the Middle East from North Africa to Central Asia, but about half of the world's Muslims live in four countries outside the Middle East: Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The religion is spreading rapidly to other areas, including North America and Europe, and overall it is growing more quickly than Christianity is. For example, there are about 2.6 million Muslims in the United States, making Islam a significant part of religious life in that country. It is also the youngest of the world religions, with a founding date in the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. on the Arabian Peninsula.

Islam is divided into two main branches:

- **Sunni** comprise 83% of all Muslims and is the largest branch in the Middle East and Asia. Although many live in the Middle East, the country with the largest concentration of Sunni Muslims is Indonesia.
- **Shiites** make up about 16% of all Muslims, and most are located in only a few countries of the Middle East. Nearly 40% of all Shiites live in Iran, 15% in Pakistan, 10% in Iraq, and 10% in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and Yemen.



**Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East.** Only two countries in the Middle East are majority Shiite: Iran and Iraq. All the rest, with the exceptions of Lebanon and Israel, are majority Sunni. A great deal of ethnic identity is based on Sunni or Shiite affiliation, and the two branches historically have experienced many tensions. The religious split is part of the reason the Middle East is one of the political and religious "hot spots" of our age.

The split between Sunni and Shiite branches occurred very early in the history of the religion, when an argument erupted over the rightful successor to Muhammad, the religion's 7<sup>th</sup> century founder. The Sunni believed that the successor should be chosen by agreement among the religious leaders, but the Shiites believed that the successor should be a member of Muhammad's family. The Sunni won the argument, but the Shiites refused to accept the decision, and the two branches have maintained their separate identities ever since, creating major divisions among and within Muslim countries that have often led to conflict.

### Buddhism

Although Buddhism is the world's third major universalizing religion, it has only 365 million followers, considerably fewer than Christianity and Islam have. The religion began on the Indian subcontinent, where its founder, Siddhartha (the Buddha) lived. The religion diffused along the Silk Road and water routes across the Indian Ocean, mainly to East and Southeast Asia, where it remains a strong religion today. Today India is overwhelmingly Hindu and Islam, with only a small fraction of its citizens identifying as Buddhists.

Buddhism has three main branches:

- **Mahayana** – 56% of Buddhists are Mahayana, or “Big Wheel,” characterized by broad incorporation of ideas and gods from other religions as it spread into East Asia.
- **Theraveda** – About 38% of Buddhists are Theraveda, characterized by a stricter adherence to the original teachings of the Buddha. This branch is strong in Southeast Asia.
- **Tantrayana** – Only about 6% of Buddhists are Tantrayana, the “Vehicle of the Text,” with its emphasis on magic as well as different meditation techniques. It is found primarily in Tibet and Mongolia.

An accurate count of Buddhists is difficult because eastern religions don't require their followers to identify with only one religion. In contrast to most Westerners, many Asians combine their religious beliefs so that they claim to be adherents to more than one belief system. For example, in Japan, many Buddhists also subscribe to Shintoism, a native Japanese religion.

### Other Universalizing Religions

Two other religions – **Sikhism** and **Baha'i** – qualify as universalizing religions because they actively seek converts to their broad views and beliefs. About 21 million Sikhs live in the Punjab region of India, with about 3 million more living elsewhere. Sikhs stress continual improvement and movement toward perfection by taking individual responsibility for their actions, a universal message that appeals to many. Sikhism combines beliefs from Hinduism and Islam – the two largest religions on the Indian subcontinent – but centers on the teachings of its founder, Guru Nanak. Baha'i is a relatively new faith, founded in Iran in 1844 by Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, known as the Bab (Persian for “gateway”). Most followers live in Iran, where they are viewed by some Shiite Muslims as heretics to the faith, since they believe that Husayn 'Ali Nuri (Known as Baha'u'llah, or “Glory of God”) was the prophet and messenger of God, not Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith.



## Ethnic Religions

Ethnic religions differ from universalizing religions in that they generally do not seek converts outside the group that gave rise to the religion. As a result, they tend to be spatially concentrated. The main exception is Judaism, whose adherents are widely scattered.

### Hinduism

Although Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, most of its 800 million adherents live in India. A few live in the neighboring country of Nepal, and only about 1% are dispersed around the world. Hindus make up 80% of the population of India, 90% of Nepal, and a small minority in every other country. Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion still in practice, but it is not tightly organized into branches or denominations. It has no central god or a single holy book, so each individual decides the best way to worship. There is a belief in the existence of a universal spirit (Brahman) that manifests itself in many shapes and forms, including the gods Vishnu and Shiva, but Hindus show allegiance to different gods.

### The Chinese Religions

Because eastern religions do not require their followers to adhere to only one faith, Buddhism often blends with local belief systems, including **Confucianism** and **Daoism**. Neither religion involves concepts of supernatural omnipotence, so they are often viewed as philosophies, not religions. Confucianism provides a code of moral conduct based on humaneness and family loyalty. Daoism holds that human happiness lies in maintaining proper harmony with nature. These faiths survive in China today, and are also influential in Korea and Japan. There is no reliable data on the number of adherents, but the collective influence of the Chinese religious complex is huge, particularly since the religions have diffused not only to Korea and Japan, but to almost all other parts of East and Southeast Asia.

### Shintoism

Shintoism is a native ethnic religion of Japan that focuses particularly on nature and reverence of ancestors. Ancient Shintoists considered forces of nature to be sacred, especially the sun and the moon, but also rivers, trees, rocks, and mountains. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shintoism became the official state religion as part of an effort by the government to increase Japanese nationalism. Shintoism still thrives in Japan, although it is no longer the official state religion. Prayers are offered to ancestors, and shrines mark reverence for house deities.

### Judaism

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, with a founding around 2000 B.C.E. by Abraham in the lands bordering the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Throughout its long existence, it has remained fundamentally an ethnic religion, a fact reflected in its relatively low numbers – about 15 million adherents. Unlike most other ethnic religions, its members are spread widely across the earth, mainly because of **diaspora**, or forced exodus from their lands of origin. About 6 millions Jews live in the United States, 4 million in Israel, and 2 million in the former Soviet Union. Within the United States,

Jews are heavily concentrated in the urban Northeast, with about one-third living in the New York area alone. The only country where Jews constitute a majority is Israel, a country created in 1948 as the Jewish homeland, the area where the religion began.

The influence of Judaism expands far beyond its numbers. It was the first recorded **monotheistic religion**, centered on the belief in one God. Christianity and Islam also have their roots in Judaism. Jesus was born a Jew, and Muhammad traced his ancestry to Abraham.

### Shamanism and Traditional Religions

**Shamanism** is an ethnic religion in which people follow their shaman, a religious leader and teacher who is believed to be in contact with the supernatural. The religion takes different forms, largely because its followers are isolated from one another. Shamanism is reflected in the “totem poles” of North American natives, and shamans in East Asia are believed to be in contact with the ancestors, an important value in China, Korea, and Japan. Shamanism in Africa often takes the form of **animism**, the belief that inanimate objects (rocks, mountain, rivers, plants) have spirits and conscious life. Shamanism is a **traditional religion**, an integral part of a local culture and society, but not all traditional religions are shamanist. Traditional African religions involve beliefs in a god as creator and protector, in spirits, and in a life hereafter, opening the way for Christianity and Islam to convert some Africans to their beliefs. However, most Africans still adhere to their native religions, especially among ordinary, non-elite people.

### The Spatial Impact of Religions

Geographers study the impact of universalizing and ethnic religions on the landscape. In large cities around the world, the tallest, most centralized, and elaborate buildings are often religious structures. Places of worship vary with the religion – churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, pagodas – but many other structures are arranged around the religious buildings. For example, the Hindu cultural landscape – urban as well as rural – is dotted with shrines that impose minimal disruption to the natural landscape. Shrines and temples are located near water, because water is part of sacred rituals, and it is believed that gods will not venture far from water. Buddhism also has affected the natural landscape through its respect for the Bodhi tree, where the Buddha first received his enlightenment in the Ganges River Valley. Bodhi trees are protected in Buddhist lands, with the religion diffused as far as China and Japan, marking the cultural landscapes of many villages and towns.

An important religious land use that impacts the cultural landscape has to do with disposing of the dead. In several religions – Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – the dead are buried in specially designated areas called cemeteries. Early Christians buried their dead in the yard around the church, but as these areas became overcrowded, separate burial grounds were established outside the city walls. Cemeteries may take up significant space in a community. Before the widespread development of public parks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cemeteries were often the only green space in cities. Cemeteries are still used as parks in Muslim countries. Because cemeteries take up land space, the government in China has ordered that the practice of burial be discontinued in order to preserve land for agriculture. Cremation is increasingly practiced instead.



**The Cultural Imprint of the Gothic Cathedral.** Gothic cathedrals were built at great expense and effort all over Europe during the Middle Ages. Today they still dominate the cultural landscapes of many cities, towns, and villages.

## POPULAR AND FOLK CULTURE

Culture may be categorized according to spatial distribution into two basic types: folk culture and popular culture. **Folk culture** is traditionally practiced by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas. **Popular culture** is found in large heterogeneous societies that are bonded by a common culture despite the many differences among the people that share it.

### Folk Culture

Folk culture is controlled by tradition, and resistance to change is strong. Most groups are self-sufficient, and their tools, food, and music tend to be homemade. Buildings are constructed with local materials without architects or blueprints, but with clear purposes and plans in mind. **Folk life** is the composite culture, both material and non-material, that shapes the lives of folk societies, such as those in rural areas in the early settlement of the United States. Today true folk societies no longer exist in the U.S., although the Amish, with their rejection of electricity, cars, and modern dress, are one of the least altered folk groups in the country. When many people who live in a land space share at least some of the same folk customs, a **folk culture region** may be recognized. For example, in the area around Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Amish have settled into farmhouses that are readily identifiable by the lack of electrical lines, buggies and horses outside, and people who dress in traditional styles. Although other people live in the area, the unique cultural landscape created by the Amish make the area a distinct folk culture region. Although only about 70,000 Amish people live in the U.S. today, their folk culture remains visible on the landscape in at least 17 states, with the largest concentrations today in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana.

### Cultural Diversity

Folk cultures usually contribute to cultural diversity because they are relatively isolated. They may diffuse to other locations, but generally the diffusion is slow because people often don't leave the areas where they grow up. A group's unique folk customs develop through centuries of relative isolation

from customs practiced by other cultural groups. Geographers P. Karan and Cotton Mather found good examples of cultural diversity among isolated folk societies that live in the Himalayan Mountains in Central Asia. Despite the fact that spatial distances are small, the groups' cultures are very different from one another. For example, only Tibetan Buddhists in the northern regions paint divine figures, such as monks and saints. In contrast, Hindus in the south prefer to paint scenes from everyday life. Some groups concentrate their art on plants and flowers, while others paint symbols and designs that reflect their religious animism.

### The Physical Environment

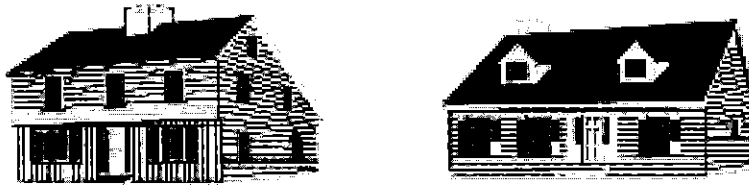
Environmental conditions limit the variety of human life anywhere, but since folk societies are usually agricultural with limited technology, they are particularly responsive to the environment. However, their methods for dealing with the environment differ greatly. For example, the custom of wearing wooden shoes in the Netherlands comes from an adaptation to working in fields that are very wet because much of the land is below sea level. Other folk cultures that work in wet fields have adapted to the environment in other ways, making the Dutch custom unique.

Food habits derive from the environment according to the climate and growing season. Rice will not grow in the cold, drier climates that wheat prefers, so the environment limits food production. However, folk societies prepare and cook foods in various ways, and they even differ in what they consider to be edible. For example, Hindu taboos against eating cows deprive some of a readily available food source. However, the taboo makes environmental sense because oxen (castrated male cows) are necessary for pulling plows that must prepare the fields when the monsoon rains arrive every year. Other food taboos have no environmental basis, such as American avoidance of eating insects, which are a readily available source of nutrition.

### Housing Styles

Housing structures reflect both cultural and environmental influences. Folk societies are limited in their building materials by the resources available in the environment. So if trees are available, wooden houses will be built, but if not, they will be constructed of stone, grass, sod, skins, or whatever else is available. Similarly, construction techniques also reflect the environment, such as building a steep roof in cold climates to reduce the accumulation of snow. Variations, though, are not always explained by environment. Cultural influences are reflected in housing styles, such as sacred walls or corners built in houses in China, Fiji, the Middle East, India, and Africa. In parts of Java, the front door always faces south, the direction of the all-important South Sea Goddess. People in similar climates choose different styles for their buildings. Some may organize everything around a central courtyard, others may build balconies on the front of their houses, and still others may build decks or patios on the back. Cultures define zones of privacy differently within a home's property, with many in East Asia building doors and walls for entrance into a garden area, a zone of privacy not usually found in homes in the West.

Housing styles may diffuse to other areas, particularly as folk cultures break up and are replaced by larger popular cultures. Traditional styles come from folk culture centers, and diffuse wherever the houses are practical or appealing to build. An example is the New England saltbox house, a practical adaptation to cold weather climate that is now widely found throughout the Great Lakes area, New York, and Pennsylvania. A Middle Atlantic style originated as a one-room log cabin with a stone chimney and



**New England Houses.** On the left is the saltbox house style originating in New England around 1650 and commonly built by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. On the right is the “Cape Cod” style, also a New England style, that originated in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Both styles diffused west and south through New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Michigan by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Traditional House in Peru.** The thatched-roof house in the modern-day photo above provides evidence that housing styles still may reflect folk cultures. Thatched roofs appear in other cultures, but this style is particular to the Andes Mountain valleys in South America.

fireplace at one end. The houses were built on to with time, often with additional rooms, a porch, and a second floor. The style spread westward throughout the mid-section of the country to the Mississippi River. In the South, houses were often built on raised platforms or stilts to allow for cool air to circulate under the floors. A similar style of house diffused from its source in the Lower Chesapeake Bay area southward along the coast as far as Georgia.

### Folk Music

North American folk music began as immigrants carried their songs to the New World, but the imported songs became Americanized, and new songs were added by American experiences. The songs developed from several folk culture regions:

- The Northern song area – This region includes the Maritime Provinces of Canada, New England, and the Middle Atlantic states. Its ballads are close to English originals, a characteristic reinforced by new immigrants. The fiddle is featured at dances, and fife-and-drum bands were popular in the early years of the Republic.

- The Southern and Appalachian song area – This region extends westward to Texas, and the music is characterized by unaccompanied, high-pitched, nasal solo singing. The words speak of hard lives, and the backwoods style that emerged forms the roots of “country” music.
- The Western song area – West of the Mississippi River this regional music reflects the experiences of cowboys, plains farmers, river people, and gold seekers. Some are reworked lumberjack ballads of the North.
- The Black Song Style Family – This style grew out of the slave experience in the rural South, and features both choral and instrumental music, a strong beat, and deep-pitched mellow voices.

### Popular Culture

In the United States folk cultures broke down during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as automobiles, radios, motion pictures, and a national press began to homogenize America. Mechanization, mass production, and mass distribution through stores and mail order diminished self-sufficiency and household crafts. Popular culture began to replace traditional culture in everyday life throughout the United States, Canada, and most other industrialized countries. **Popular culture** is primarily but not exclusively urban-based, with a general mass of people conforming to and then abandoning ever-changing cultural trends. Popular culture is pervasive, and involves the vast majority of a population, exposing them to similar consumer and recreational choices, and leads them to behave in similar ways. Folk culture encourages cultural diversity among groups; popular culture breeds homogeneity.

In reality, folk cultures don’t go away entirely, but they blend with popular culture, and differences between local and universal become less apparent.

### National Uniformities and Globalization

Landscapes of uniformity through popular culture tend to take on a national character, so that the American or Canadian way of life is different from the English or the Japanese way of life. National chain stores, gas stations, restaurants, and motels appear, all with identical outside and inside architecture and style. In recent years many of these chain stores have globalized, so that they may be seen in many countries. In particular, American popular culture has diffused to many areas of the world through global communication and transportation networks. The globalization of popular culture is seen in clothing styles, television shows, movies, and acceptance of western business conduct and institutions. Of course, standardization is not complete, and national and regional cultural contrasts still remain.

Many people resent the globalization of popular culture, and some governments officially oppose or control it. Iran restricts Western radio and television programs and enforces traditional dress for women, including head coverings. China, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries impose internet surveillance and censorship and demand that U.S.-based search engines filter offensive content. In recent years the globalization of popular culture has come to be seen as a type of dominance by the West, and resisting it is thought to preserve non-Western ways of life.

## Environmental Impact of Popular Culture

Popular culture is less likely than folk culture to be distributed with consideration for physical features, partly because it often significantly modifies or controls the environment. Technologies can reproduce natural features, yet place them in unnatural settings. For example, the “strip” in Las Vegas is lined with hotels and casinos that reproduce the cultures of ancient Egypt, New York City, Venice, Paris, the Middle East, and ancient Rome – all set within the natural desert landscape.

Some environmental consequences of popular culture include:

- **Uniform landscapes** – Not only do buildings look alike, but they are arranged on streets that look the same no matter where they are. Fast food restaurants are next door to chain motels, which in turn border gas stations and convenience stores. These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, or perhaps even the name of the company.
- **Increased demand for natural resources** – Fads may increase demands for animal skins, such as mink, jaguar, leopard, or kangaroo for fashionable clothing. Eating habits may demand consumption of food that is not efficient to produce. For example, to produce 1 pound of beef, the animal needs to consume about 10 pounds of grain. For chicken, the ratio is 1 to 3. This grain could be fed to people directly, bypassing the inefficiency of producing the meat.
- **Pollution** – One of the most significant problems of modern mass society is the pollution created by a high volume of wastes – solids, liquids, and gases – that must be absorbed into the environment. Solid products – cans, bottles, old cars, paper, and plastics – are discarded rather than recycled. Folk cultures have sometimes been hard on the environment, too. For example, during the Middle Ages, many of the forests of Europe were cut down to provide fuel for warmth and cooking. However, the level of waste that folk cultures generate is usually far less than that created by people in the era of popular culture.

## CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Each culture region develops a distinctive cultural landscape as people modify the environment to their specific needs, technologies, and lifestyles. For example, terraced fields of crops up the mountainsides represent a distinctive feature of the cultural landscape of the Andes Mountain region in South America. The cultural landscape of the Rocky Mountain region in North America looks very different because the U.S. and Canadian cultures formed at different times, with a different mix of population, money, diets, technology, and trade patterns.

### Landscapes and Values

The value systems of cultures affect the ways people use the natural environment, and so, the appearance of the cultural landscape. Native Americans of the Central Plains were basically hunters and gatherers who viewed the land space not as property but as the source of their sustenance, whereas Europeans coming into the area looked for areas to grow their crops and animals to trade back east. In many ways

the buffalo symbolized the contrasting value systems. Native Americans used every part of animals that they killed because they were necessary for survival. Europeans saw buffalo as a source of hides to sell or trade, and left the carcasses to rot, leaving Native Americans without the necessities of life. Farmers who moved into the area valued soil, and so changed the cultural landscape from one that characterized hunting and gathering to one dotted with farmhouses, fences, roads, and rows of crops. In areas where industry has displaced agriculture, energy is more valuable than soil, and so the cultural landscape changes to one marked with factories, cities, and centers of distribution. Today unaltered wilderness has again become valued as an end in itself, as a place that inspires and comforts the human spirit. Those with this value want factories disassembled, mines reclaimed, and deforested areas reseeded.

### Landscapes and Identity

Culture is evident everywhere throughout the landscape in adaptations of the natural landscape as well as in toponyms, types of architecture, and designs of towns and cities. People express cultural beliefs through transforming elements of the world into **symbols** that carry a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture. Examples are monuments, flags, slogans, or religious icons, and through landscaping and house types. Symbols express personal identity in many different ways. A national flag represents an affiliation with a country, and a cross is a religious symbol to many Christians. Landscaping a piece of property may express a need for order, beauty, and creativity. Geographers who study the cultural landscape recognize that the concept of **regional identity** can be problematic as symbols clash with values of people in other regions. For example, the Muslim practice of never depicting Allah or Muhammad in paintings or drawings clashed with the western value of freedom of the press when a Danish cartoonist broke the ban in 2005. Religious structures and figures, languages, political leaders, and sports teams may all serve as sources of regional identity.



**Cultural Identity through Mascots.** The above drawings of a bear, a blue jay, and a bobcat represent some common mascots for sports teams. The symbol represents more than the team, but the cultural identity of a school that often draws from a culture region. The cultural landscape around the school often makes common use of the symbols, and students even wear them on their clothing and book bags.



**Symbols.** The three symbols above represent various cultural landscapes and help to form cultural identities. The Buddha statue on the left is a complex symbol central to many Buddhist beliefs; in many western countries, the hand gesture in the middle symbolizes victory; and the hand gesture on the right symbolizes prayer.



## Symbolic Landscapes

All landscapes can be seen as symbolic, since they have accumulated various meanings over time. The signs and images found in the landscape convey to us messages that demand interpretation. At the simplest level, traffic signs tell us to “stop,” “slow down,” or travel at a certain speed. Public monuments and statues are symbols deliberately inserted into the landscape as messages to be read. They often commemorate bravery, feats performed in battle, or political allegiance. Although many symbols today are international, others reflect regional cultures that give people a sense of place.



**Universal Symbols.** This photo taken in Xi'an, China, of three Americans and three Muslim Chinese illustrates the point that symbols may cross cultures and have international meaning.

## TERMS AND CONCEPTS

acculturation  
animism  
artifacts  
assimilation  
Baha'i  
behaviors  
beliefs  
bilingualism  
Buddhism  
Confucianism  
contagious diffusion  
creole  
cultural determinism  
cultural diffusion  
cultural ecology  
cultural geography  
cultural hearths  
cultural landscape  
cultural relativism  
cultural transmission  
culture complex  
culture region  
culture system  
culture trait  
Daoism  
dialect  
diasporas  
Durkheim's sacred and profane  
Eastern Orthodox  
environmental determinism  
ethnic religion  
ethnocentrism  
extinct language  
folk culture  
folk culture region  
folk life  
geographic region  
Hagerstrand, Torste  
hierarchical diffusion  
Hinduism  
humanism  
independent inventions  
Indo-European language family  
Islam  
isogloss

Judaism  
language  
language families  
language sub-family  
lingua franca  
linguistic fragmentation  
linguistic geography  
Mahayana  
Marxism  
material culture  
migrant diffusion  
monotheistic religion  
multilingualism  
non-material culture  
norms  
official language  
pidgin  
popular culture  
Protestants  
regional identity  
religion: branches, denominations, sects  
relocation diffusion  
Roman Catholics  
Sauer, Carl  
shamanism  
Shiite  
Sikhism  
standard language  
stimulus diffusion  
Sunni  
symbolic landscape  
symbols  
syncretism  
Tantrayana  
Theraveda  
time-distance decay  
toponymy  
traditional religion  
transculturation  
universalizing religion

