

Lecture Notes

TOPIC: CULTURE & GEOGRAPHY

1. Items of Culture

Culture trait

- Units of learned behavior ranging from the language to tools
- Trait might be the object, technique, belief or any attitude
- Traits are the most elementary expression of the culture

Culture complex

- Individual culture traits that are functionally interrelated comprise a culture complex. Example, keeping a cattle is a culture trait, wealth of a person determined by keeping cattles is culture complex

Culture system

- When culture traits and complexes become spatially associated with people is called as culture system example multiethnic culture system and multi linguistic culture system

Culture Region

- Portion of earth's surface occupied by population sharing recognizable and distinctive culture characteristics

Culture realm

- A set of culture region showing related culture complexes and landscapes groups to form a culture realm

Definitions of Culture

human-made part of the environment (Melville Jean Herskovitz)

the learned patterns of thought and behaviour characteristic of a population or society (D.R. Harris)

GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

Culture, the total way of life that characterizes a group of people, is one of the most important things that geographers study. There are literally thousands of cultures on Earth today and each contributes to global diversity. One reason for the existence of so many cultures is that there are so many ways that Earth's 6.3 billion people can be culturally different. Specifically, a culture consists of numerous cultural components (see chart below) that vary from one culture group to the next.

2. Major types of Culture

There are three main types of culture

a. Artifacts

The material culture of the society e.g. Housing structure, buildings, equipment and all material things that are utilized by society

b. Mentifacts

The mental and philosophical thinking's that determines the religion and concepts of the society. It is the non material culture

c. Socio-facts

Social structure and social organization of the society which describes its social norms, rules and family systems. Both mentifacts and socio facts are known as non-material culture of the society

3. Cultural Components (a partial list)

Religion		Language		Architecture		Cuisine		Technology		Music
Dance		Sports		Medicine		Dress		Gender roles		Law
Education		Government		Agriculture		Economy		Sport		Grooming
Values		Work ethic		Etiquette		Courtship		Recreation		Gestures

For example, language is a cultural component. While some cultural communities use English, others speak Spanish, Japanese, Arabic, or another of the thousands of languages spoken today. Religion is another cultural component, and there are hundreds (if not thousands) of ways that different culture groups practice and are characterized by that trait. Likewise, there is a world of cultural differences with respect to technology and medicine, economic and agricultural activity, and modes of architecture and transportation. Moreover, [cultural communities](#) may differ in their dress, grooming, music, cuisine, dance, sport, etiquette, and other cultural components, all of which make for a culturally diverse world

Cultural components are not limited to humans. Culture characterizes Earth as well; for it is primarily through the agency of their culture that people interact with and modify Earth's surface. Thus, areas may have different looks and feels that reflect differences in culture. For example, church steeples dominate the skylines of numerous small towns in New York State. Minarets dominate similar settlements in the Middle East.

4. CONCEPTS OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Because of the innumerable cultural differences that characterize people and land the world over, there is an entire subfield of geography devoted to the study of culture—appropriately named [cultural geography](#)

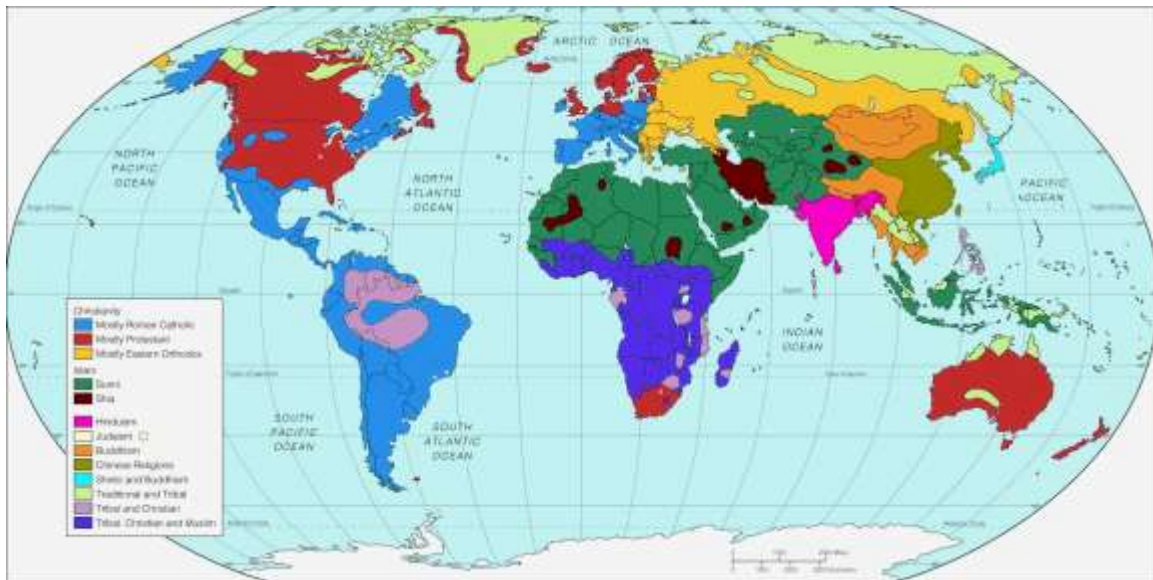
Culture Region

A [culture region](#) is a portion of Earth's surface that has common cultural elements. Identifying and mapping culture regions are significant tasks because they show us where particular culture traits or cultural communities are located. Maps of culture regions provide answers to the most fundamental geographical question: Where?

The concept of culture region serves roughly the same educational purpose as that of historical period. When teaching world history, for example, the subject is commonly divided into time segments that might be labeled The Neolithic Revolution, The Cold War Era, and so forth. The purpose of these arbitrary divisions is to make world history more comprehensible by dividing it into periods that have common themes. Similarly, the purpose of regions (which also are arbitrary) is to make geography—or cultural geography, in this case—more comprehensible by dividing the world into areas that have something in common.

Culture regions, like cultures themselves, display considerable variety. For starters, any number of cultural components may be used to define culture regions. A map of world religions, for example, includes a shaded area in South Asia where Hinduism is dominant (see Fig. 2). That is a culture region based on a single cultural component, as are each of the other shaded areas on that map. Similarly, a language map of Europe would show a shaded area where Basque is dominant (see Fig. 3). That also would be a culture region based on a single cultural component. In contrast, if you were teaching about Japan, you might ask your students to go down the list of cultural components and characterize the Japanese culture region with respect to religion, language, architecture, cuisine, and so forth. For comparison's sake, you might then compare that list to the U.S. culture region, or to the Mexican culture region, or the culture region of some other country.

Culture regions differ greatly in size. Some are exceedingly large, like the Islamic culture region that encompasses millions of square miles of North Africa and Southwest Asia. Some are very small, like Spanish Harlem, which encompasses about two square miles of Manhattan. Many others are of intermediate size, like the Corn Belt, which occupies a portion of the midwestern United States.



When students see the words *Hindu culture region*, they may logically infer that only Hindus live there. Not so. That region also is home to millions of Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and other non-Hindus. Similarly, there are some people in Spanish Harlem who do not speak Spanish, and some farmers in the Corn Belt who do not grow corn. Culture regions tend to exhibit a certain diversity—their titles identify a dominant characteristic (Hinduism, Spanish, corn) but do not necessarily mean that everybody who lives there shares that characteristic. Students should understand that diversity typically exists within a culture region through the use of specific examples, to avoid making logical assumptions that are nevertheless wrong.

Culture regions can be found in [urban](#), [suburban](#), or [rural](#) settings. Many cities contain ethnic neighborhoods. Basically, these are urban culture regions whose borders are defined by the locations of specific cultural communities. Different cities around the world have ethnic mixes, however. If you were teaching about France, for example, your students would discover that Arabs, sub-Saharan Africans, and West Indians comprise large ethnic communities in many cities. In Germany, in contrast, Turks and various Slavic peoples often are the major groups. Urban fringes the world over also exhibit cultural differences. The typical American suburb exhibits housing, land use, and lifestyles that differ significantly from what is observed on the periphery of cities in West Africa or Central America, for example (see Fig. 4). Rural parts of the world may differ on the basis of language, religion, or some other cultural component—most notably agriculture. Thus, dairy farming and apple growing characterize different sections of rural New York State. Both are visually distinctive and may be thought of as separate culture regions. In contrast, rural culture regions elsewhere in the world might be dominated by cattle ranches, rice fields, banana plantations, or some other form of agriculture.

Over time culture regions tend to appear and disappear, and expand and contract in between. Many millennia ago, for example, there were no human beings in North America. In the course of subsequent migrations, however, different peoples occupied different parts of the continent. As a result, by 1492 North America was a mosaic of Native American culture regions. Many of them have since disappeared or have diminished in size. Similarly, an ancient Phoenician culture region gave way to a Roman culture region, which in turn disappeared. Much more immediately, there are lots of areas and neighborhoods in New York State and elsewhere that are experiencing "[ethnic change](#)"—a situation in which one cultural community is expanding or contracting in opposition to another.

The latter highlights the fact that culture unites and divides humanity: while it instills a sense of unity among some peoples, it creates differences (perhaps deep animosities) between others. Accordingly, maps of culture regions may provide important perspectives on contemporary problems that are rooted in cultural differences. For example, Americans have come to appreciate that all Iraqis are not the same. Rather, they are divided mainly into three cultural communities (Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds) who occupy culture regions that are more or less separate. To a large degree, the future of Iraq is likely to be determined by the extent to which the occupants of those culture regions work together for the common good.

5. Cultural Interaction

[Cultural interaction](#) focuses on the relationships that often exist between cultural components that characterize a given community. When geographers seek to explain why a particular culture trait is found in a particular area, they often discover that the answer lies in another trait possessed by that same cultural community. This demonstrates that cultural components may be interrelated.

Here is a collage of examples. Concepts of personal privacy in Islamic and Iberian culture regions often explain why residences lack street-level windows. Buddhists regard golden colors as a symbol of enlightenment. That explains why gold-domed temples figure so prominently in cultural landscapes in various parts of Southeast Asia. If the residents of a particular neighborhood were conservative Jews, then that would explain the presence of kosher grocery stores, signs in Hebrew, synagogues, and particular styles of clothing. Because north was a sacred direction to the ancient Mayans, the boulevard-facing facades of their temples were always aligned in a north-south manner

Bars and liquor stores are not likely to be found in Muslim neighborhoods because Islam forbids consumption of alcoholic beverages. Cultural interaction may explain the presence—as well as the absence—of particular traits in particular areas.

These examples attest to the explanatory power of cultural interaction. But they also demonstrate that religious beliefs often underlie relationships between cultural components. That presents educators with a quandary. Few culture traits have the power

and importance of religion. Indeed, religion is often the key to understanding the way of life of a particular cultural community. One needs to tread carefully.

6. Cultural Ecology

- Ecology is two-way relationship between an organism and its physical environment
- Cultural ecology is the study of the cause-and-effect interplay between cultures and the physical environment
- Ecosystem entails a functioning ecological system where biological and cultural *Homo sapiens* live and interact with the physical environment.
 - Culture is the human method of meeting physical environmental challenges.
 - adaptive system
 - assumes plant and animal adaptations are relevant
 - facilitates long-term, successful, nongenetic human adaptation to nature and environmental change
 - adaptive strategy that provides necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, defense
 - No two cultures employ the same strategy, evenin within the same physical environment
 - The physical environment plays a powerful role in the cultural landscape of this remote region of Pakistan's northern frontier.
 - The Muslim, Pathan have an adaptive strategy of harnessing local resources for their needs

Four schools of thought developed by geographers on cultural ecology

- Environmental determinism
- Possibilism
- Environmental perception
- Humans as modifiers of the earth

Environmental Determinism

- Developed during the first quarter of the 20th century.
- Physical environment provided a dominant force in shaping cultures
- Humans were clay to be molded by nature
- Believed mountain people, because they lived in rugged terrain were:
 - Backward
 - Conservative
 - Unimaginative
 - Freedom loving
- Believed desert dwellers were:
 - Likely to believe in one god
 - Lived under the rule of tyrants
- Temperate climates produced:
 - Inventiveness
 - Industriousness
 - Democracy

- Coastlands with fjords produced navigators and fishers
- Overestimated the role of environment

Possibilism

- Took the place of determinism in the 1920s
- Cultural heritage at least as important as physical environment in affecting human behavior
- Believe people are the primary architects of culture
- Physical environment offers numerous ways for a culture to develop.
- People make culture trait choices from the possibilities offered by their environment to satisfy their needs.
- High technology societies are less influenced by physical environment.
- Geographer Jim Norwin warns control over environment may be an illusion because of possible future climatic changes.

Environmental Perception

- Each person's or cultural group's mental images of the physical environment are shaped by knowledge, ignorance, experience, values, and emotions
- Environmental perceptionists declare-choices people make will depend more on how they perceive the land's character than its actual character
- People make decisions based on distortion of reality with regard to their surrounding physical environment
- Geomancy—a traditional system of land-use planning dictating that certain environmental settings, perceived by the sages as auspicious, should be chosen as the sites for houses, villages, temples, and graves (feng-shui)
 - an East Asian world view and art
 - affected the location and morphology of urban places in countries such as China and Korea
 - diffused (look up feng-shui on internet)
- Human's perceptions of natural hazards
 - Flooding, hurricanes, volcanic eruption, earthquakes, insect infestations, and droughts
 - Some cultures consider them as unavoidable acts of the gods sent down as punishments because of the people's shortcomings
 - During times of natural disasters, some cultures feel the government should take care of them
 - Western cultures feel technology should be able to solve the problems created by natural hazards
- In virtually all cultures, people knowingly inhabit hazard zones
 - Especially floodplains, exposed coastal sites, drought-prone regions, and active volcanic areas
 - More Americans than ever live in hurricane- and earthquake-prone areas of the United States

