

UNIT THREE: CULTURAL PATTERNS AND PROCESSES

CULTURE AND THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Culture is the collection of beliefs and artifacts that represent values and social institutions. Culture can be material or non-material. **Material culture** is comprised of concrete artifacts, while **non-material culture** includes abstract beliefs and ideals. Clothing worn for religious reasons would be considered material culture, while belief in that religion would be non-material. Geographers divide the study of culture into folk and popular culture. **Folk culture** is typical of isolated, homogenous communities, while popular culture is seen in large, heterogenous societies with access to modern communication and technology.



The **cultural landscape** is the imprint humans place on their environment. It is the combination of human activities. Each culture creates a distinctive cultural landscape. These landscapes are the combinations of physical features, agricultural and industrial practices, religious and linguistic characteristics, and other expressions of culture, like architecture.



No two places are the same—people will represent who they are—and what they value—based on how they shape the use of space.

CULTURAL PATTERNS AND PROCESSES

As communication technology increases, so too does the spread of ideas and information. Cultural ideas and innovations change, disappear, and influence so much of human identity.

DIFFUSION

Migration is the movement of people across space. But when ideas, behaviors, and information spreads, it is called **diffusion**. Cultural characteristics originate in **hearths** and spread differently. The two categories of diffusion are **relocation** and **expansion**. There are four types of expansion diffusion: **contagious**, **stimulus**, **hierarchichal**, and **reverse hierarchichal**. As interactions between cultures occur, new forms of cultural expressions are created. **Syncretism** is when a group combines elements of different cultures to forge a new cultural idea.



Historically, the diffusion of ideas has been coupled with the migration of people. Through colonialism, imperialism, and trade, cultural practices were spread all over Earth. Modern communication technologies—like the Internet—have accelerated cultural interactions and diffusion among people, thus changing cultural practices. **Cultural convergence** is the tendency for cultures to become more and more similar over time, whereas **cultural divergence** occurs when cultures become less and less similar over time.

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CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFUSION

As ideas and information spread across space over time, various consequences emerge—both good and bad. For example, as the English language becomes more widely accepted, it could lead to the loss of traditional languages—but its spread has also made international trade and travel much easier. **Acculturation** is when an ethnic group moves to a new location and adopts both cultures—the culture they left and the culture they entered. **Assimilation** occurs when the migratory group no longer resembles the culture they left—they resemble the culture they entered. **Multiculturalism** is created when various cultures co-exist. In contrast, **nativism** is the belief that foreign cultures should be excluded from the accepted cultural beliefs and expressions of a society.



THE GEOGRAPHY OF LANGUAGES

Language is mutually understood sounds used to communicate between people. A **dialect** is a regional variety of a language. For example, English is a language with many dialects—English in Australia is different from that spoken in America. Dialects exist within countries, too. English is not spoken the same across all regions of the United States. The boundary between linguistic differences is called an **isogloss**.

Some global estimates put the number of spoken languages over 6,000; however, the vast majority of these languages are spoken in very small numbers. The most spoken native, or first learned, language is Mandarin Chinese, but the most spoken language is English. When speakers of different languages communicate using a third language, that language is called a **lingua franca**. English is considered the world's lingua franca.

Because of their shared history, languages can be organized into **families**, **branches**, and can be displayed on a **language tree**. The world's most spoken language family is the **Indo-European**, which includes English, Spanish, Hindi, Bengali, Portuguese, among others. Mandarin is in the second largest language family—**Sino Tibetan**.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF RELIGIONS

Few other human activities have influenced the use of space the way religion has. Religious artifacts have long marked Earth's landscape. Geographers categorize religions into two categories: ethnic and universalizing. An **ethnic religion** is a religion related to—and attempts to appeal to—a particular ethnicity. The most practiced ethnic religions are Hinduism and Judaism. Ethnic religions are typically located near their hearths or spread through relocation diffusion. **Universalizing religions** attempt to appeal to all people, regardless of ethnicity. The most practiced universalizing religions are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism. Universalizing religions diffuse through both relocation and expansion diffusion.

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Religions interpret events, people, and artifacts differently. Even within a religion, there can be disagreements on these interpretations. Consequently, religions can be broken down into **branches**, **denominations**, and **sects**. Strict interpretation of a religion's holy text is called **fundamentalism**. Belief in the holy text with some human interpretation is called **conservatism**, whereas belief with higher degrees of human interpretation is called **liberalism**.

**GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization is the process of becoming world-wide in scope. **Globalization** increases the likelihood of interaction between places, regardless of distance. Geographers can study globalization by analyzing both economy and culture. Today's economy is one characterized by globalization and interdependence. **Transnational corporations** conduct business in multiple countries and help create an interdependent global distribution of goods. Consumers in the developed world often purchase products manufactured or grown in the developing world. The globalization of culture can be seen as the cultural landscapes of the world become increasingly similar. As artifacts and ideas of popular culture spread around the world, use of space can become less distinctive. For example, the heart of every major city contains high-rise skyscrapers, and distinguishing one downtown from the next can become difficult.

**NOTES**
