

Folk and Popular Culture

What is culture?

Formal definition:

- Culture is a shared set of meanings that are lived through material and symbolic practices of everyday life

Geography is concerned with how culture shapes space and place. How place and space can influence cultures

Habit

- Repetitive act that a particular individual performs
wearing jeans to class every day

Custom

- Repetitive act of a group, performed to the extent that it becomes characteristic of the group
College students wear jeans to class every day
Adopted by most of the society's population

Folk Culture

Limited to a smaller region
and smaller groups of
people

- Stable / close knit

Homogenous groups

- Usually a rural community

Isolated groups that have had
long-lasting culture traits
that have not changed
substantially over long
periods

isolation/lack of interaction
breeds uniqueness and ties
to physical environment

Folk customs often have
anonymous hearths

- Originate from
anonymous sources

- At unknown dates

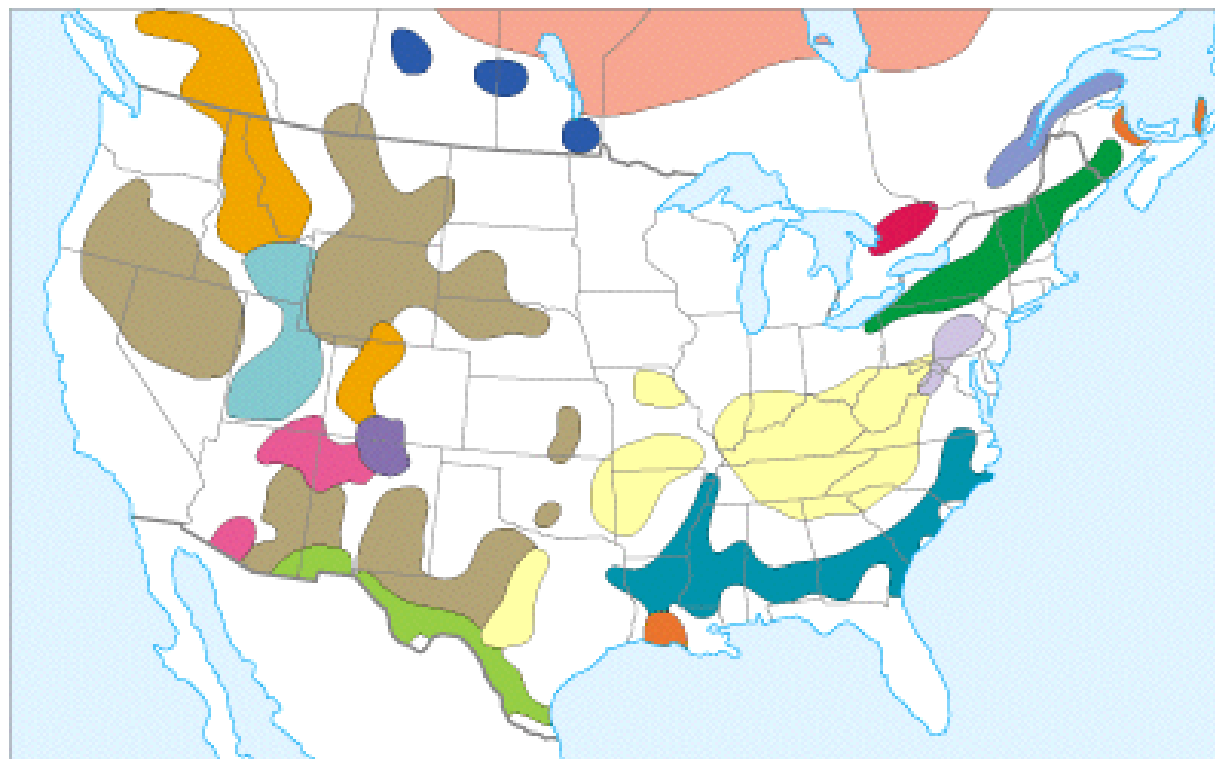
- Unidentified originators

Resistance to change

- Diffuses slowly

Usually spreads through
relocation diffusion

Surviving folk culture in North America



- Québec French
- Acadian French
- Yankee
- Upper Canadian
- Pennsylvanian
- Upland southern
- Mexican
- Highland Hispanic
- Mormon
- Mountain western
- African-American
- Northern Forest Native American
- Southwestern Native American
- Plains ranch
- Ukrainian

Popular Culture

Found in large,
heterogeneous societies

Mass culture that diffuses
rapidly

- Spreads through
expansion diffusion
hierarchical

Some believe it threatens
local or regional
distinctiveness

- Cultural homogeneity
Effects on landscape create
homogeneous “placeless
landscape”

Seen by some as threat to
the environment

- Increased consumption
Plastic water bottles



Globalization of culture

Often destroys folk culture
or preserves traditions
as museum pieces or
tourism gimmicks

Western Media Imperialism

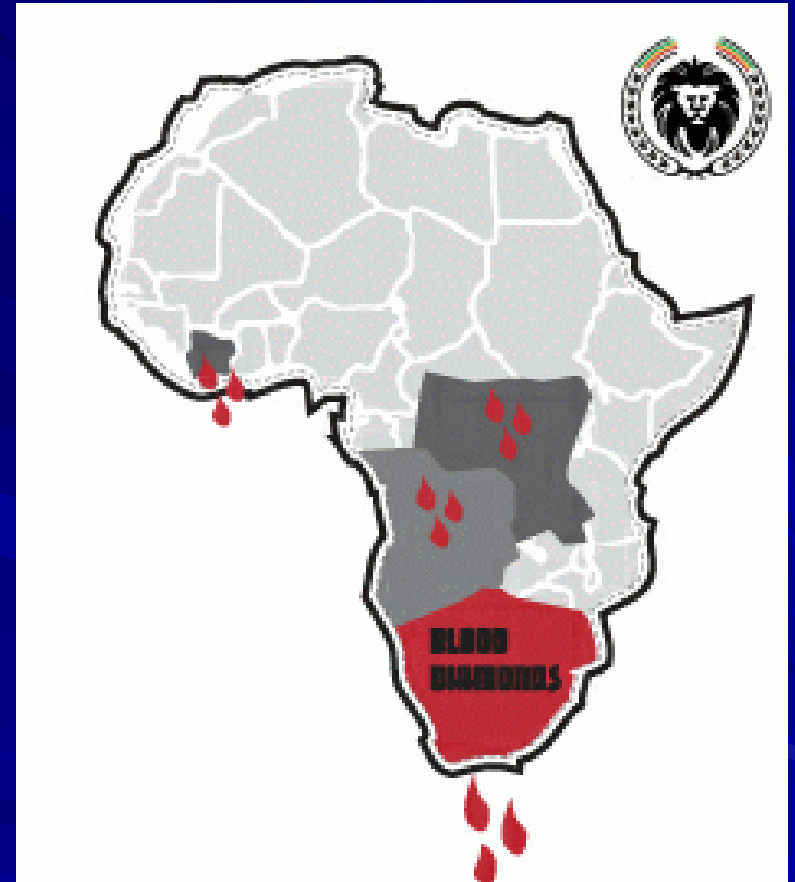
- US, Britain, and Japan dominate media worldwide
- US and British provide “news”
- Unlikely to focus on third-world perspective, issues important to LDC's



Globalization of culture

Environmental Problems

- Accelerated use through accelerated consumption
- Western fashion
[hip hop/ diamonds](#)
- Inefficient over-consumption of meats



Cultural Imperialism

Diffusion of popular culture can contribute to cultural conflict when part of a group may protest the arrival of a type of popular culture in its region

Cultural nationalism

- The resistance by a group of people against cultural imperialism and cultural convergence

[McDonald's attacks](#)

Cultural imperialism

- The invasion of a culture into another with the intent of dominating the invaded cultural politically, economically, and/or socially.

Globalization is often seen as causing cultural imperialism and the controversy surrounding its cultural consequences.

Key Issue 1:
**Where do Folk and Popular
Cultures Originate and Diffuse?**

Origin of Folk and Popular Cultures

A social custom originates at a hearth

Folk customs has anonymous hearths



Popular culture is often product of MDCs

– Examples”

Music

Food

– Arise from combination of advances in industrial technology and increased leisure time



Origin of Folk Music

Exemplifies differences in origins of folk and popular culture

Music “invented” in China in 2697 B.C.

Folk songs tell a story or convey information about:

- daily activities
such as farming
- life-cycle events
- mysterious events such as storms or earthquakes

Folk music:

- usually unidentified
- transmitted orally

Can be modified from generation to generation as conditions change



Origin of Popular Music

Music written by specific individuals for the purpose of being sold to a large number of people

- Takes technological skill
- Performed in studio with equipment

Originated in 1900

- Music industry developed out of Vaudeville
- Tin Pan Alley developed in New York
- Later moved to Broadway



Diffusion of American Music

During WWII

- Diffusion of American music worldwide increased
 - Armed Forces Radio
- English became international language for popular music
 - Musicians around the world write and perform in English



Hip Hop

Hip Hop originated in New York
in 1970's in South Bronx

- Low- income
- Spread to other low-income neighborhoods

Queens, Brooklyn, Harlem

Local "twists"

Demonstrates the interplay
between globalization and
local diversity

- Makes local references but is diffused throughout the world

1980's

- Spread to Atlanta and Oakland
- Then to other large cities in the U.S.



Diffusion of Folk and Popular Cultures

Spread of popular culture typically follows the process of hierarchal diffusion from hearths

- Hearths in US include Hollywood and New York City



Folk culture is transmitted from one location to another more slowly and on a smaller scale

- Relocation diffusion

Pop culture diffuses through use of modern communications and transportations

Folk Culture

The Amish:

- Culture visible on the landscape in at least 19 states

Distinctive clothing, farming, and religious practices

Still travel by horse and buggy and use hand tools

Only 400,000





Sports: Hierarchical Diffusion of Popular Culture



Provides examples of how popular culture is diffused

- Most sports originated as isolated folk customs and were diffused like other folk culture, through migration of individuals

Folk Culture Origin of Soccer

- World's most popular sport
- Origin obscure
 - Earliest evidence in England in 11th century
 - After Danish invasion in which workers “kicked the Dane’s head” and was imitated by boys

Higher incomes allowed spectators to pay

- To meet demand, hired professional players

Clubs formed an association formed in 1863 to standardize rules and organize professional leagues

- Organization into formal structure marks **transition** from folk culture to popular culture

Today

Spectator sports are today part of popular culture

- Common element is willingness of people throughout the world to pay for viewing

World Cup is a great example of the diffusion of soccer

- Final of world cup watched by more people than any other sport in history



Key Issue 2

Why is Folk Culture
Clustered?

Influence of Physical Environment

▶ Folk societies are particularly responsive to the environment

- Limited technology
- Agricultural economy

▶ Environmental Determinism?



Customs such as food, clothing, and shelter are influenced by prevailing climate, soil, and vegetation

- Arctic climates= fur boots to protect
- Netherlands: custom of wooden shoes worn as they work in fields that are extremely wet

Influences of Physical Environment

Environmental conditions can limit the variety of human actions anywhere

Different societies prefer different foods and styles of house construction

Two necessities of daily life- food and shelter- demonstrate the influence of cultural values and environment on the development of unique folk culture.



Distinctive Food Preferences

Folk food habits are embedded especially strong in the environment

- Humans eat mostly plants and animals

Inhabitants of a region must consider:

- Soil
- Climate
- Terrain
- Vegetation



Food Preferences

▶ People adapt their food preferences to conditions in the environment



- Europe:

- ▶ traditional preferences for quick-frying foods in Italy resulted in part from fuel shortages
- ▶ In Northern Europe, an abundant wood supply encouraged the slow-stewing and roasting of foods

- Asia

- ▶ Soybeans
- ▶ Fuel scarce
 - Asians adapted



Food Attractions

▶ Everything in nature carries a signature, or distinctive characteristic, based on its appearance and natural properties.

- Certain foods are eaten because their natural properties are perceived to enhance qualities considered desirable by the society

▶ Example: Abipone Indians of Paraguay eat Jaguars and bulls to make them brave



Food Taboos

▶ People refuse to eat particular plants or animals that are thought to embody negative forces in the environment.

- protect an endangered animal
- Conserve natural resources

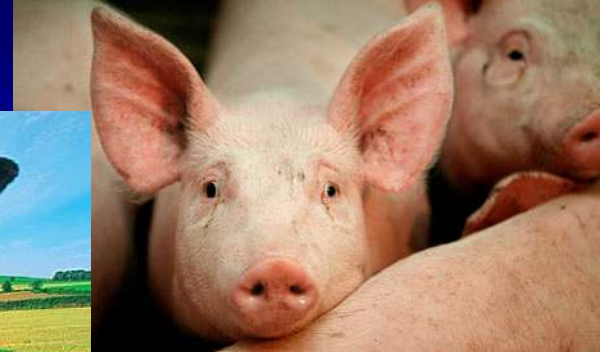
Taboo:

- Restriction on behavior imposed by social custom



Plate of Insects

Food Taboos



Taboos can be found in several religions including:

- Christianity

Not many taboos

- Judaism

Taboos

- Animals that do not chew own cud
- Animals that have cloven feet
- Fish lacking fins and scales

Why?

- Concern for environment
- Land near Mediterranean

- Islam

Pork

Why?

- Pigs unsuited for dry land of Arabian Peninsula
Compete with humans
Ecological disaster

- Hinduism

Cows

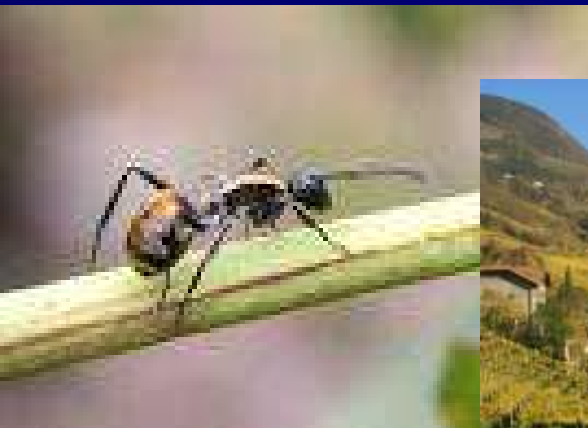
- Why?

Environment
Religion

Food Taboos

Taboos are often found in countries that are dominated by popular culture

- Americans don't eat insects



Terroir

- Contribution of a location's distinctive physical features to the way food tastes

Effects of local environment on a particular food item

Often used to refer to the combination of soil, climate, and other physical features that contribute to the distinctive taste of a wine.

Isolation Promotes Cultural Diversity

A group's folk customs develop through centuries of relative isolation from customs practiced by other cultural groups





Himalayan Art

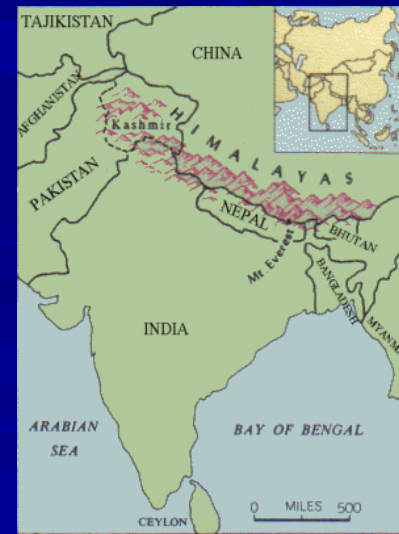


Study of Himalaya Mountains

Distinct views of the physical environment emerge among neighboring cultural groups that are isolated

- Four religious groups
 - Tibetan Buddhists in north
 - Hindus in the south
 - Animists in the east
 - Muslims in the west

Through paintings each group revealed how their folk culture mirrored their religion and views of the environment



Folk Housing

The house is a product of both cultural traditions and natural conditions

- Reflection of cultural heritage, current fashion, functional needs, and the impact of the environment



Distinctive Building Materials

Type of building materials used to construct folk houses is influenced partly by resources available

- Two most common materials are wood and brick

Wood preferred because it is easy to build with

- Log cabins in forested regions

Choice of building materials is influenced both by social factors and what is available in the environment



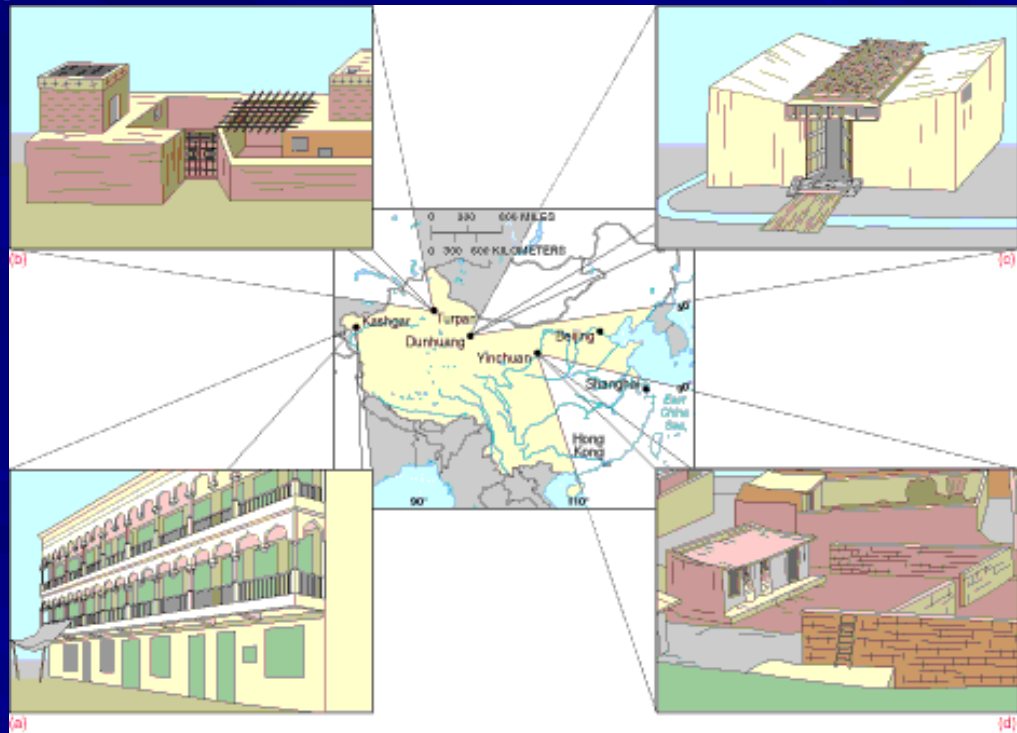
Housing

▶ Even in areas that share similar climates available building materials, folk housing can vary because of minor differences in environmental features

▶ Example: China

- All use similar building materials
- Share similar objective
 - ▶ Temp protection
- All have individual designs

▶ Differences attributed to local cultural preferences



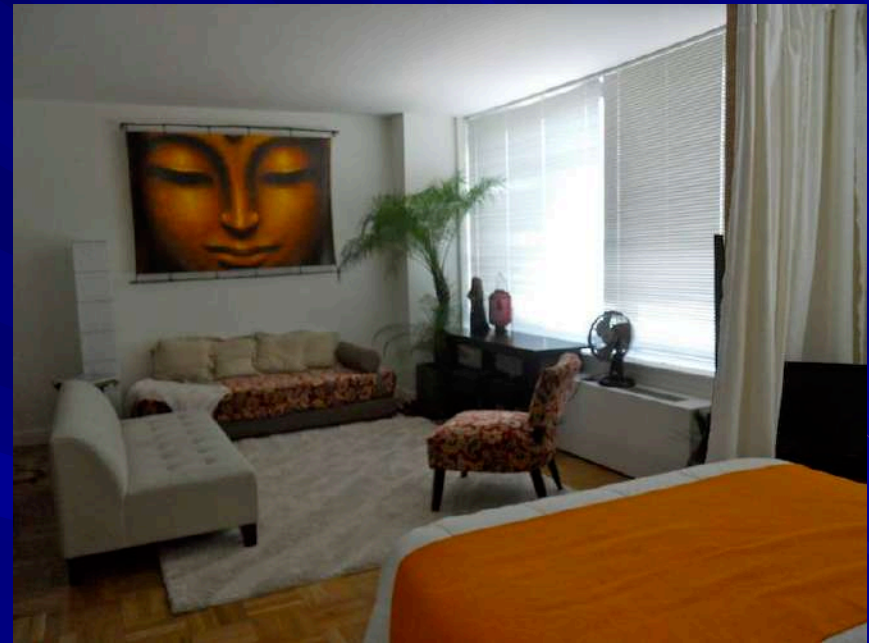
Distinctive House Form and Orientation

- ▶ Form of houses might reflect religious values, environmental, and social conditions.



Beliefs and Folk House Forms

- ▶ The distinctive form of folk houses may derive primarily from religious values and other customary beliefs rather than from environmental factors
 - Compass directions may be more important than others



Sacred Places

Java

- Front door often faces south
- Direction of the South Sea Goddess
Holds the key to earth

Fiji

- East wall of house sacred

Madagascar

- Main door on west
Most important direction

▶ Thailand

- Yuan and Shan
- Sleep with head towards east
- Staircases must not face west

▶ Direction of death and evil spirits

▶ Laos

- Beds perpendicular to the center ridgepole in house
- Head = noble, high value
- Feet = low value

U.S. Folk House Forms

Older houses in U.S.
display local folk-culture
traditions

- When families migrated west new homes reflected preference on East Coast

Three major hearths of folk
house forms in U.S.:

- New England
- Middle Atlantic
- Lower Chesapeake



U.S. Folk Housing

Lower Chesapeake

- Tidewater style
- Typically one-story
 - Steep roof
 - Chimneys at either end
- Migration spread these houses from Chesapeake Bay – Tidewater, Virginia area to Southeast coast



U.S. Folk Housing

The Middle Atlantic

- Principle house
 - “I” house
 - Two full stories
 - Gables on sides
 - One room deep, two rooms wide
- Migrants carried house type westward across Ohio Valley and along Appalachian trail
 - Most prevalent



U.S. Folk Housing

▶ New England

- Four house types popular at various times in 18th and 19th centuries
 - ▶ Sailbox
 - ▶ Two-chimney
 - ▶ Cape cod
 - ▶ Front gable and wing
- Migrants carried house types northward to upper NE and across Great Lakes regions



U.S. Folk Housing

- ▶ Today distinctions are relatively difficult to observe in the United States
 - Degree of regional distinctiveness diminishing
 - ▶ Rapid construction
 - ▶ Communication/transportation
 - No longer built by people, mainly companies

