

4

Geographies of Culture and Landscape

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- The concepts of culture and society are intimately related.
- Culture is understood as the way of life of a society's members that differentiates them from other groups. It refers to their language, religion, clothing, foods, forms of settlement, and social practices among other things.
- Society is defined by a cultural group living in structured system of human organization, which provides protection, security, and a sense of identity.
- Human geographers perceive variations in culture spatially.
- Different civilizations have resulted in different cultural regions.
- Regions and their characterizing landscapes are not simply locations; they are also places in the sense that they convey meaning.
- Geographers have tried to explain the global distribution of culture and civilizations, both past and present.
- Two factors that define culture are language and religion.
 - Language interests human geographers for a variety reasons. It is a cultural variable, and a learned behaviour; it is useful in delimiting groups and regions; it explains divisions between people and places; and it explains human interaction with the environment.
 - Religion is consists of a shared set of beliefs and associated activities that are expressed through behaviour, text, habits, symbols, and landscapes.
- Globalization and migration have blurred many boundaries of language and religion.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- recall how culture, society, and civilization are defined and differentiated;
- recognize and comprehend the role of culture as a divider across the globe;
- understand how geographers characterize cultural regions and landscapes;

- understand the relationship of language to culture and nationalism;
- describe the main world religions and the history of their global distribution; and
- understand the relationships of religion and culture, religion and society, and how religion is associated with sacredness and the contestation of space.

KEY TERMS

Animism A set of beliefs that attribute a spirit or soul to natural phenomena and inanimate objects. (p. 156)

Caste A hierarchical social rank, based solely on birth, to which an individual belongs for life and that limits interaction with members of other castes; an element of Hindu society. (p. 156)

Creole A pidgin language that assumes the status of a native language (mother tongue) for a group. (p. 151)

Cultural adaptation Changes in technology, organization, and ideology that permit sound relationships to develop between humans and their physical environment. (p. 138)

Cultural regions Areas having a degree of homogeneity in cultural characteristics; areas with similar cultural landscapes. (p. 130)

Culture A way of life of a society's members, including belief systems, norms, and material practices; typically refers to language, religion, clothing, foods, forms of settlement, social practices, and so on that differentiate one group from another. (p. 130)

Ethnic religion A religion, usually of narrow geographic scope, that is tied to a particular ethnic or tribal group and does not actively seek converts; examples include Hinduism, Judaism, Shinto, Taoism, and Confucianism. (p. 156)

Exonym A name given to a place (or group of people) by a group other than the people to whom the name refers (or who are not native to the territory within which the place is situated). (p. 153)

First effective settlement A concept based on the likely importance of the initial occupancy of an area in determining later landscapes. (p. 133)

Gemeinschaft A form of human association based on loyalty, informality, and personal contact; assumed to be characteristic of traditional rural village communities. (p. 141)

Gesellschaft A form of human association based on rationality, formality, depersonalization, and anonymity; assumed to be characteristic of people in urban communities. (p. 141)

Homeland A cultural region especially closely associated with a particular cultural group; the term usually suggests a strong emotional attachment to place. (p. 135)

Language A system of communication that has mutually agreed-upon spoken and (usually) written forms. (p. 142)

Language family A group of closely related languages derived from a common but distant ancestor. (p. 144)

Lingua franca An existing language that is used as a common means of communication between different language groups. (p. 150)

Minority language A language spoken by a minority group in a country in which the majority of the population speaks another language; may or may not be an official language. (p. 150)

Monotheistic religion A religion in which adherents worship a single god. (p. 156)

Multilingual state A country in which more than one language is spoken, in either official or popular use. (p. 148)

Nationalism The expression of belonging to and self-identifying with a nation (a cultural group); goes along with a belief that a nation has the right to determine its own affairs; the belief that a nation and a state should be congruent. (p. 148)

Pidgin A composite language, consisting of vocabulary from two or more languages, designed to facilitate communication and commerce between different language groups; typically has a limited vocabulary. (p. 150)

Polytheistic religion A religion in which adherents worship more than one god (often many). (p. 156)

Religion A social system involving a set of beliefs and practices through which people make sense of the universe and their place within it. (p. 153)

Topophilia The affective ties that people have with particular places and landscapes; literally, a love of place. (p. 135)

Topophobia The feelings of dislike, anxiety, fear, or suffering associated with particular places and landscapes. (p. 135)

Universalizing religion A religion of broad geographic scope that expands and diffuses through the active conversion of new members (via proselytizing); examples include Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. (p. 156)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the cultural landscape where you were born? Research and describe the history of language and religious beliefs in your hometown.
2. Choose a religion and describe its diffusion over time and its influence on the landscape.
3. How does language relate to culture? Can cultures exist without language? Does culture change when new languages appear in a region?
4. When religion views space as sacred there can be both positive and negative outcomes. What are these? Use examples to support your discussion.
5. Describe the relationship of language to landscape. How is landscape understood through language?

LINKS OF INTEREST

- The Canadian Encyclopedia
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadas-first-english-settlement-feature/>

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
<http://www.unesco.org>
- Indigenous People's Atlas of Canada
<https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/article/connection-to-the-land/>
- World Atlas of Language Structures
<http://wals.info/>
- North American Religion Atlas
<http://www.religionatlas.org/>
- Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative
<http://www.ecai.org/culturalatlasportal/CAB-RegionQdisplay.asp>

SUGGESTED READINGS

Harrison, K. D. 2007. *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.

A careful consideration of the threats posed by language loss, described as a catastrophe of cultural forgetting.

Hitchcock, S. & J. Esposito. 2006. *Geography of Religion Where God Lives, Where Pilgrims Walk*. Washington DC: National Geographic Society.

A detailed and highly visual account of five faiths: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, from their origins to the twenty-first century.

Jordan-Bychkov, T. G., and B. Bychkova Jordan. 2002. *The European Culture Area: A Systematic Geography*, 4th edn. London: Rowman and Butterfield.

One of the few cultural geographies of a major world region; includes a highly original synthesis and analysis of language, religion, and other cultural traits.

McCrum, R. 2011. *Globish: How English Became the World's Language*. Toronto: Anchor Canada.

This book traces the history and diffusion of the English language around the world and ultimately the creation of a single global language.

Meinig, D. W. 1969. *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

One of several fine regional studies by this author; includes several original approaches to region and landscape analysis.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

TEDx Talks. 2015. “The myth of globalisation | Peter Alfandary | TEDxAix.” YouTube video, 13:53. Posted June 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUYNB4a8d2U>

1. How is “global village” explained as an oxymoron?
 - The speaker begins by telling a couple of different stories based on his own interactions around the world. The cab or the Japanese business stories are all examples of how, while we may share common languages, food, even beliefs, there are huge differences that are largely cultural. The idea that we live in a global village is incorrect based on this argument.
2. How is the relationship between cultural variability and context described in the video?
 - The speaker explains how we communicate but that is not “contact.” We are relying on data too much. Cultural shock was used to describe disorientation when an expat went to another country. Now, cultural shock is invisible. It is virtual and hidden behind technology.

TEDx Talks. 2019. “Why Indigenous Languages Matter and What We Can Do to Save | Lindsay Morcom | TEDxQueensU.” YouTube video, 14:06. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2HiPW_qSrs

1. Why are so many Indigenous languages endangered in Canada?
 - Throughout the years many Canadian laws, policies, and governments have attempted to eliminate Indigenous languages and cultures. For a long period of time, Indigenous children were taken from their communities and their homes and forced to attend residential schools where they were not allowed to speak their Indigenous languages and were being assimilated to Canadian culture. Many of them suffered severe emotional, physical, sexual, and cultural abuse.
2. What can we do to save and preserve Indigenous cultures and languages?
 - We need to create active policy with attached funding to ensure that Indigenous languages are included in education both on and off the reserve; we need support through allotment of space, people wanting to learn the language and people talking about why they are important; lastly we need education, and to provide it in provincial schools and to the non-Indigenous population for better understanding.