

**PATTERNS OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive anthropological analysis of the complex patterns of thought and practice that shape human societies. It examines the multifaceted concept of culture, exploring its material and immaterial components, including beliefs, values, symbols, language, and social behaviors. Drawing on foundational theories and contemporary perspectives, the article highlights the significance of cultural relativism as a tool for understanding cultural diversity and overcoming ethnocentrism. Additionally, it addresses the dynamic nature of cultural transmission and transformation in the context of globalization and intercultural interactions. The discussion further encompasses key anthropological concepts such as enculturation, acculturation, cultural diffusion, and multiculturalism. By synthesizing theoretical insights with practical implications, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of human social complexity and promote intercultural respect in an increasingly interconnected world.

Key words: culture, psychology, sociology, anthropology, material, spiritual, educational, idea, trust, belief.

Introduction. Children's ability to easily acquire various cultural traditions depends on their learning capacity. Animals, for instance, learn from experience—such as learning to avoid fire after feeling pain. Social animals also learn from other members of their group. For example, wolves may learn hunting strategies from other wolves.

However, human cultural learning is particularly advanced and is intrinsically linked to our capacity to distinguish symbols—even those that bear no direct connection to what they represent. Based on cultural learning, humans are able to generate, remember, and engage with ideas. They comprehend and apply systems of symbolic meaning.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined culture as a system of ideas based on cultural learning and symbolism. Cultures have been described as “control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions, what computer engineers would call programs—for governing behavior” [5, p.44]. These “programs” are internalized by individuals through culture within specific traditions.

Over the course of their lives, people begin to better understand pre-established systems of meaning and symbols that help guide their beliefs and way of life. Each person undergoes a process of enculturation, through which they consciously or sometimes unconsciously adopt cultural norms while interacting with others.

Culture is sometimes taught explicitly. For example, parents may teach their children to say “thank you” when someone gives them something or does something kind for them. But culture is also acquired through observation. Children closely watch what happens around them. They modify their behavior not only because others tell them to, but also because they draw conclusions about what is right or wrong based on what they observe.

In his book *Cultural Intelligence*, Brooks Peterson writes: “After teaching graduating students and professionals about culture for many years, I have sometimes found that people remain confused about the actual meaning of the term culture. People tend to think of culture as a rich and fascinating topic (and I agree with that view). But is that truly all there is to it?” [2, p.16].

When the concept of culture is discussed, the first association that typically arises in people's minds is geographical location—such as tribal culture, urban culture, national culture, and so on.

From this perspective, it becomes evident that culture can be analyzed on both **macro** and **micro** levels.

On the **macro level**, we may refer to Asian culture, American culture, African culture, or the cultural dichotomy between the East and the West. On the **micro level**, we might cite examples such as Khorezmian culture or Manhattan culture.

Although this approach represents one of the most common ways of defining culture, the concept is not limited to geography alone. As previously mentioned, culture encompasses a wide range of socially acquired elements, including values, beliefs, institutions, artistic expressions, and the diverse products of human behavior and thought. Importantly, these cultural patterns are specific to particular **eras, social strata, communities, or nations**. For example, we might speak of Edwardian culture, Japanese culture, or the culture of poverty.

The lexical meaning of the word culture may include a seemingly limitless array of elements—history, identity, geographical location, language, religion, race, hunting practices, music, agriculture, art, and more.

If we were to synthesize these components to form a working definition, we could say that **culture is a property that encompasses what people think, what they do, and how they feel**. Furthermore, culture can include insights from **psychology, sociology, and anthropology**. It is clear that there is no single, exhaustive way to define culture. The concept is inherently **dynamic and context-dependent**, varying across fields of study and professions. For instance, there are distinct cultural patterns in teaching professions versus entrepreneurial environments.

Brooks Peterson also offers the following interpretation of culture in Cultural Intelligence: “Culture is a relatively stable set of internal values and beliefs that are shared by a group of people in a given country or community, and which have a noticeable influence on their external behaviors and environmental interactions.” [2, p.26].

In everyday discourse, it is not uncommon to encounter both valid and misguided assumptions about culture. For example, people might say things like, “A cultured person listens to this type of music,” or “A cultured person doesn’t go to that kind of restaurant,” or “A cultured individual would order this specific type of dish.” However, from an anthropological standpoint, individuals are not classified as either cultured or uncultured.

Rather, every individual possesses a culture of their own.

Research Methodology. Over the past centuries, anthropologists have proposed numerous definitions of the concept of culture. For example, in their seminal 1952 work, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn [1, p. 21] compiled over 160 different definitions of culture. This diversity of definitions should not be seen as evidence that anthropology lacks coherence or rigor; rather, it highlights the multifaceted nature of culture and suggests that many of these definitions share common conceptual elements.

In Cultural Anthropology by Gary Ferraro and Susan Andreatta, we find a definition that reflects many of the ideas mentioned above:

“Culture is everything that people have, think, and do as members of a society.” [4, p. 25].

This definition is built around three core verbs—**have, think, and do**—which correspond to key components of culture:

- **What people have** refers to material possessions and tangible artifacts.
- **What people think** refers to cognitive elements, such as beliefs, values, ideas, and attitudes.
- **What people do** encompasses behavioral patterns, particularly those with educational or normative significance.

Thus, any given culture consists of:

1. **Material objects** (tools, technologies, artworks, etc.),

2. **Cognitive and ideological elements** (beliefs, worldviews, values, and social attitudes), and
3. **Normative and behavioral practices** (customs, rituals, and manners of socialization).

Analysis and Results. **Although culture can be broken down into components, it is rarely possible to isolate them completely in real life, as they are deeply interdependent. In fact, these components are so interconnected that distinguishing between them in practice can be analytically challenging.**

For example, consider the diversity of written communication practices. When we say “I wrote a letter,” we might imagine using paper, a pen, or a pencil. However, in the United States, the same activity may primarily be conducted using a computer or digital device. In today’s globalized world, we observe that writing practices have shifted significantly, with computers and smartphones becoming standard tools for written communication in many parts of the world. This example illustrates how **definitions and practices of culture are not static**; they are **contextual and subject to temporal change**.

Anthropology students, in studying various human societies, often encounter cultural diversity shaped by **distinct political, economic, and religious systems**. Yet, despite these differences, there is also **an underlying commonality**—namely, that **culture establishes boundaries of socialization and offers a framework for navigating future behavior**.

Historical Background. **The concept of culture was first systematically developed by anthropologists in the late 19th century. One of the earliest and most influential definitions was offered by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, a British anthropologist. In his 1871 work, Tylor defined culture as follows: “Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”**

This foundational definition laid the groundwork for modern anthropology, framing culture as a comprehensive and acquired system of meaning, practice, and social organization.

Language is a fundamental vehicle through which societies encode, transmit, and transform patterns of thought and behavior. The relationship between language and cognition has been widely explored, notably through the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which proposes that language influences how individuals perceive and interpret reality. Different linguistic structures shape unique worldviews, thereby affecting cultural practices and social interactions. For example, languages with rich vocabularies for kinship terms or spatial orientation can foster heightened awareness and complex social networks. Preservation of endangered languages is therefore critical, not only for maintaining communication but also for safeguarding diverse cultural logics and knowledge systems that underpin traditional practices.

The contemporary process of globalization exerts profound influence on local social practices and cultural traditions. On one hand, globalization facilitates the exchange of ideas, technologies, and customs, enabling hybrid cultural forms and innovation. On the other hand, it can also lead to cultural homogenization, where dominant cultural models overshadow indigenous traditions, resulting in cultural loss or marginalization. Digital media and communication technologies have accelerated these dynamics, simultaneously offering platforms for cultural expression and exposing communities to external pressures. Understanding this dual impact is crucial for developing strategies that balance cultural preservation with adaptive change.

Patterns of thought and practice are deeply intertwined with social power relations. The concept of cultural hegemony, articulated by Antonio Gramsci, describes how dominant groups in society maintain their authority not only through political or economic means but also by shaping cultural norms and values. This hegemonic influence determines which cultural practices are legitimized and which are devalued or suppressed. Minority cultures often resist such dominance through cultural revitalization, adaptation, or subversion. Analyzing these power dynamics offers critical insight into the persistence of inequality and the contested nature of cultural identity formation.

The perpetuation of cultural patterns occurs through complex processes of socialization and enculturation, wherein individuals acquire the skills, values, and behaviors necessary to function within their communities. These processes operate both formally (via institutions such as family, schools, and religious organizations) and informally (through daily interactions and observation). Storytelling, rituals, and symbolic practices play key roles in reinforcing collective memory and social cohesion. Furthermore, cultural transmission is not static; it involves negotiation and reinterpretation, allowing cultures to evolve while maintaining continuity.

Recommendations. Intercultural relations refer to the idea that individuals from different cultural backgrounds can develop relationships in which they acknowledge, respect, and begin to understand each other's diverse ways of life. People from distinct cultural origins may encounter situations they had never previously considered, due to cultural differences or customary constraints. Traditional practices from one culture may not be acceptable in another, as such practices could be perceived as "inappropriate" or "incorrect" from the perspective of another cultural system.

The goal of intercultural engagement is to create opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, though it can also present risks. Once intercultural relations are established, it becomes increasingly difficult—if not impossible—to regard any one cultural worldview as the absolute truth.

The concept of **cultural relativism** asserts that people's values, knowledge, and behaviors must be understood within the context of their own culture. This is one of the most foundational concepts in sociology, as it acknowledges and affirms the relationship between broader social structures and individual lived experiences.

The concept of cultural relativism, as we understand and apply it today, was first developed as an analytical tool in the early 20th century by **German-American anthropologist Franz Boas**. In the context of early social science, cultural relativism became a key instrument in challenging **ethnocentrism**—a prevalent view at the time, particularly among elite, white, Western males, that often devalued or marginalized non-Western and lower-class populations.

In addition to cultural relativism, several other key concepts are central to the study of culture, including:

- **Ethnocentrism:** The practice of judging other cultures by the standards of one's own, often assuming cultural superiority.
- **Cultural universals:** Cultural features or elements that are found in all human societies, such as language, family systems, and rituals.
- **Enculturation:** The lifelong process through which individuals acquire their own culture by interacting with their surrounding environment, beginning from birth.
- **Acculturation:** A specific form of cultural transmission in which a subordinate group adopts elements of a dominant culture, often under unequal power dynamics.
- **Cultural diffusion:** The spread of cultural traits (such as material objects, ideas, or behavioral patterns) from one society to another.

- **Multiculturalism:** A sociopolitical philosophy or policy that recognizes and affirms the legitimacy and value of all cultural groups within a society.

Moreover, culture can be categorized into **formal** and **informal** types. Formal culture includes state-sanctioned holidays and customs, while informal culture encompasses traditions and rituals created and passed down organically by the people over generations.

For example, holidays such as **New Year**, **Navruz**, **International Women's Day (March 8)**, and **Independence Day** represent **formal cultural practices**, whereas religious celebrations (e.g., **Eid**) and **wedding customs** exemplify **informal cultural traditions**.

The exploration of patterns of thought and practice from an anthropological perspective reveals the intricate and multifaceted nature of human social life. These patterns, shaped by a complex interplay of beliefs, values, symbols, language, and material expressions, are neither static nor universally fixed. Instead, they evolve continuously through processes such as socialization, cultural transmission, and intercultural interaction. The concept of cultural relativism underscores the necessity of understanding these phenomena within their specific social and historical contexts, challenging ethnocentric biases and promoting a more nuanced appreciation of human diversity.

Moreover, globalization and technological advances have intensified intercultural encounters, simultaneously offering opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and posing risks of cultural homogenization. Power relations and hegemonic influences further complicate this landscape, shaping which patterns become dominant and which are marginalized. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for fostering intercultural respect and effective communication.

Ultimately, culture—or more precisely, the patterns of thought and practice that define societies—serves as both a repository of collective memory and a living framework that adapts to contemporary realities. Through comprehensive anthropological inquiry, we gain deeper insights into how humans create meaning, maintain social cohesion, and negotiate identity across time and space. This understanding not only enriches academic discourse but also provides practical guidance for promoting harmonious coexistence in our increasingly interconnected world.

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