Cultural Anthropology

Global Forces | Local Lives

Third Edition

Jack David Eller

Cultural Anthropology

Cultural Anthropology: Global Forces, Local Lives presents all the key areas of cultural anthropology as well as providing original and nuanced coverage of current and cutting-edge topics. An exceptionally clear and readable introduction, it helps students understand the application of anthropological concepts to the contemporary world and everyday life. Thorough treatment is given throughout the text to issues such as globalization, colonialism, ethnicity, nationalism, neoliberalism, and the state.

Changes for the third edition include a brand new chapter on medical anthropology and an updated range of case studies with a fresh thematic focus on China. The book contains a number of features to support student learning, including:

- A wealth of color images
- Definitions of key terms and further reading suggestions in the margins
- Summaries at the end of every chapter
- An extensive glossary, bibliography and index.

Further resources are provided via a comprehensive companion website.

Jack David Eller is Associate Professor (Emeritus) of Anthropology at the Community College of Denver, USA. An experienced teacher and author, his other books for Routledge include *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (second edition, 2014), *Cultural Anthropology: 101* (2015), and *Culture and Diversity in the United States* (2015).

Praise for this edition:

"*Cultural Anthropology* stands apart from other textbooks and is a truly unique option for introductory anthropology classes. Eller's use of language is concise and accessible to the entry-level student. More importantly, the text offers a refreshingly clear focus on the relationship between culture, power and the central social issues of the world."

Andrew Nelson, *University of North Texas, USA*

"I have repeatedly returned to Eller for his ability to make difficult subjects accessible without condescension or dilution. This very good introduction is well written and hits all the marks of four field anthropology (and beyond) while never losing the important focus of culture and the human experience."

Anjana Mebane-Cruz, *Farmingdale State College, SUNY, USA*

"I would definitely recommend this text to students … it is simply excellent"

Peter Collins, *Durham University, UK*

"This textbook will undoubtedly prove invaluable to anthropology students, orientating them into the extensive world of contemporary anthropology. Of particular note is the clarity with which anthropology is presented as offering indispensable insights into the globalized world, whilst not shying away from addressing global political and economic concerns."

Hannah Rumble, *University of Exeter, UK*

"Finally, an introductory textbook with real substance. Eller's thoughtful account takes his readers seriously, providing them with a no-nonsense rendition of cultural anthropology, both past and present. This book does true justice to our discipline."

John T. Friedman, *University College Roosevelt Academy/Utrecht University, the Netherlands*

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Global Forces, Local Lives

Third edition

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Introduction

Are the Chinese happy? China's economic growth has been spectacular and world-altering, but it has also left income inequality, unemployment, population upheaval, and destruction of entire neighborhoods in its wake. No wonder "there are low levels of self-reported happiness" (Yang, 2013: 295) in the country. *Xiangpi ren* (literally "rubber people") has become a popular term for the common syndrome of "numbness, hopelessness, loss of passion in life" (299) experienced by overworked and underpaid Chinese. However, as in many parts of the contemporary world, the official message is that workers' problems are their own doing, a consequence of bad attitude and lack of adaptability rather than of structural abuses. Consistent with global neoliberalism, China has engaged in individualization and "psychologization" of social ills, encouraging citizens to practice happiness as they cultivate their individual "potential"—even if this is *wei xingfu*, "false/fake happiness" (293). One of the key vehicles for spreading the message of (fake) happiness is television, specifically televised "counseling programs" (292) like *The Secrets of My Happiness*, which "celebrates individuals from all walks of life—but especially disadvantaged citizens—by demonstrating how their optimism and happiness helped them realize their potential and achieve success" (293). Not all Chinese viewers are seduced by the rhetoric of happiness, and Jie Yang argues that the government intentionally promotes happiness as a distraction from the social and political injustices of a rapidly changing society and as an obstacle to collective political action that would threaten the state and its ruling party.

A century ago, during its infancy, cultural anthropology might have been described as the study of "traditional" or "primitive" societies, and some observers may still imagine it as such. However, as it has matured—and as the world that it studies has transformed—it has become a much more relevant and exciting investigation into the cultural processes that construct and conjoin modern societies and the modern global system, of which those traditional or primitive societies have become part. People still live local lives, in their particular places and times, but they are increasingly influenced and interlinked by global forces.

Cultural anthropology is the science of contemporary human behavioral diversity. It puts "culture" or learned and shared ways of thinking, feeling, and acting at the center of analysis, but it maintains a "biocultural" perspective, in which bodies, the surrounding environment, and even physical objects are integral to social life. It takes "change" or dynamism as seriously as "tradition" or the past, and it reveals the lived experiences of people, often obscured or distorted by official accounts and policies. Finally, culture no longer stays within the confines of a specific society—if it ever did—but rather flows and circulates and fuses into infinite new combinations. The case of Chinese happiness exemplifies many of the interests of present-day cultural anthropology—culture change, industrial work, state policies, and popular

culture. It is to introduce and celebrate the achievements of cultural anthropology, and to indicate the contributions that it can and will make to our understanding of contemporary and future cultural circumstances, that this book was written.

PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF THE BOOK

I have taught cultural anthropology for over twenty years, yet I was frustrated from the very start of my teaching career with the organization of most courses and texts on the topic. All of them naturally include a discussion of the concept of culture and its major components, like language and gender and personality. All of them present an analysis of the important areas of culture—economics, politics, kinship, and religion. However, typically they offer at most a couple of concluding chapters on "culture change" and "the modern world" as if these matters are tangential, almost anathema, to anthropology and barely within its purview. This is simply not true: Movement is an inherent part of culture, and the modern world is the most critical subject for all of us, since it is the world that we, modern nation-state populations and indigenous peoples alike, inhabit.

So, I found teaching a course with thirteen weeks dedicated to the basics of cultural anthropology and a couple of weeks devoted to "the modern world" to be akin to spending thirteen weeks learning the grammar and vocabulary of a foreign language and only two weeks actually speaking (that is, *applying* or *using*) the language. That is inadequate. If cultural anthropology cannot be applied usefully to contemporary life, then it is fatally flawed. Fortunately, it can be and has been. Of course, in the days before the internet, it was more difficult to provide students with information that was not already integrated into textbooks. It was possible, although costly, to photocopy materials for distribution; often, as a teacher I was compelled to talk about topics for which the students had no readings in hand.

In response, I created my own addendum to formally published books, covering crucial issues like colonialism, nationalism and ethnic conflict, economic development and global poverty, indigenous peoples, and cultural movements. That addendum evolved into the third section of this book, which was composed first. Subsequently, I realized that I had a worthwhile perspective on the entire discipline of cultural anthropology, one that would allow me to craft a complete textbook embodying the same principles as I had established in the final section. The result is the book you are holding in your hands.

COVERAGE OF THE BOOK

There are many fine and venerable textbooks, and some innovative new ones, on cultural anthropology. The world does not need another one unless it has something new to offer. The student and instructor, and anyone interested in the discipline, will find that this book covers more topics more deeply than rival texts and in so doing immerses the reader in the worldview, the history, the literature, and the controversies of cultural anthropology like no other.

Certainly, the present book includes all of the standard and necessary topics of a cultural anthropology text, as mentioned above. Even these are presented in novel and usefully organized ways. However, it also provides original and nuanced coverage of a number of topics that are customarily given insufficient attention or no attention at all, such as:

- a sophisticated and subtle discussion of cultural relativism
- an integrated analysis of the biological and evolutionary basis of culture
- a meaningful description of the emergence of anthropology out of Western intellectual traditions
- details on culturally relevant genres of language behavior, such as political speech, jokes and riddles, and religious language, based on the notion that language is social action
- a refined discussion and critique of the race concept
- the presentation of gender not only in relation to women, but also to the construction of maleness and of alternate genders across cultures
- the inclusion of consumption as part of the anthropology of economics
- the integration of kinship-based groups into a more general analysis of social group formation
- a contribution to an anthropology of war

- a cutting-edge description of the composite nature of religions, set within the question of social legitimation
- extended discussion of colonialism and post-colonialism
- serious presentations on nationalism, ethnicity, and other forms of identity politics
- major attention to development policies and practices and the role anthropology has played and can play in them
- the recognition and inclusion of indigenous sources and voices
- a balanced analysis of possible futures of culture based on integrative and disintegrative processes
- inclusion of state-of-the-art anthropological concepts including globalization and glocalization, multi-sited ethnography, world anthropologies, microfinancing, diaspora, cultural tourism, popular culture, and multiple modernities

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

The present book offers a number of features, within specific chapters and across the structure of the entire book, which enhance the readability and the utility of the text. Each chapter, for example, includes:

- an opening vignette
- at least three boxed ethnographic case-studies to pursue issues in more depth
- a closing "Contemporary cultural controversy" box to spark analysis and debate
- a brief but meaningful summary
- a list of key terms
- notes in the margins of pages, providing definitions, intra-text references, resources (books, videos, etc.) for further research, and references to the companion website

In addition to chapter-specific features, the overall construction of the book includes:

- colorful and relevant illustrations
- organization into three sections of equal length, with one-third dedicated explicitly to contemporary cultural processes
- extensive intra-textual references, so that readers may find links between subjects discussed in more than one chapter
- three in-depth case-study discussions, entitled "Seeing culture as a whole," distributed evenly through the text (one-third, two-thirds, and end point) to summarize and integrate the preceding chapters
- a glossary
- an unusually thorough bibliography
- a bonus online chapter on the anthropology of art

GUIDE TO MARGINS

The margins contain:

- Definitions of key terms
- Cross-references to other chapters
- Key texts
- Key film resources
- Key websites

The  icon refers to an audio introduction by the author available on the companion website for each chapter.

The  icon refers to supplementary reading available on the companion website.

The  icon refers to further resources curated by the author on the companion website.

The  icon refers to multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions available on the companion website.

COMPANION WEBSITE

The book is supported by a rich and dynamic companion website, with resources for student and instructor alike, including three or more supplemental original readings per chapter, providing significant and extensive additional material. See: www.routledge.com/eller.

Features include:

- Bonus chapter on art
- Supplementary readings
- PowerPoint slides

- Study guides
- Audio guides
- Testbank (multiple choice and fill in the blanks)
- Questions for review/discussion
- Glossary flashcards
- Links to useful websites and video material

CHANGES TO THE THIRD EDITION

The third edition is a significant modification and update of the second edition, which itself was a substantial modification of the original text. In addition to the features retained from the second edition, the new edition includes the following expanded or enhanced features:

- new opening vignettes for almost all of the chapters
- new closing "Contemporary cultural controversy" cases for the majority of chapters
- a new topical theme—China—with nine boxed case studies on China, one "Seeing Culture as a Whole" case, and numerous other references across chapters
- new boxed case studies—almost all of them ethnographic—for all of the chapters, evenly distributed across the world's geographic areas and as recent as 2015, featuring examples like anthropology in the global Ebola crisis, important women in early anthropology, Mexican beach vendors, Iranian temporary marriage, international journalists, Pentecostal television, forest conservation, the U.S. automobile industry, and surgical training, to name a few
- extensive revisions to chapters 3 (Origins of Cultural Anthropology), 7 (Economics), 9 (Politics), 12 (Colonialism), 13 (Postcolonial politics), and 14 (Post-colonial economics)
- condensed discussion of pre-modern economic, political, and religious systems to allow more space for contemporary topics like the corporation, work, and the informal economy; citizenship and policy; and Christianity, Islam, paganism, and cognitive-evolutionary theory of religion, among others (much of the previous materials on pre-modern systems has been retained as supplemental readings on the companion website)
- extended or brand new discussions of enskilment, materiality, consumption, age and youth, friendship, colonialism and governmentality, borderlands and illegality, and the precarity of work under new regimes of accumulation
- two new "Seeing culture as a whole" extended case studies, on Western "transnationals" living in China and on Boko Haram and Islamic violence in Nigeria
- an entire new chapter on medical anthropology
- more supplemental readings on the companion website (at least three per chapter) more tightly integrated with the textbook

My hope is that this textbook, the fruit of two decades of my teaching experience and more than a century of the experiences of cultural anthropologists, will communicate the relevance, urgency, and excitement of cultural anthropology that I feel and that I try to convey to my students. Culture matters, and there is no more pressing task for professional anthropologists and for the educated public than to realize that most if not all of the present problems and challenges facing humanity are cultural at heart—related to how we identify ourselves, how we organize ourselves, and how we interact as members of distinct human communities. Cultural anthropology has made significant contributions to these questions, and it is my heart-felt hope that this book will help future anthropologists and world citizens make even more significant contributions.

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MAP 0.1 Major societies mentioned in the text


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Understanding anthropology

1

> Why do we gather customs all the world over? Because science is comparative; it has to be, for the reason that one case is never sufficient to serve as the basis for theory; no more is a large number of cases all identical. It is only in variation that we can observe under what conditions certain phenomena appear, and under what conditions they do not appear.
>
> (Hocart, 1936: 580)

In 2001, fifty-two years after Mao Zedong's communist revolution, China unveiled a new national garment, the *tangzhuang*. The occasion was the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Shanghai, a testament to the economic and fashion advances of China since Deng Xiaoping announced a change of course in 1978 from the former Communist Party planned economy to a path of "modernization," essentially (and apparently contradictorily) Communist Party-sponsored capitalism. As customary, the heads of state attending the APEC meeting gathered on the final day of the event wearing "clothes presented by the host country that reflect its culture and tradition" (Zhao, 2013: 70), and the *tangzhuang*, a silk jacket, was chosen over several other proposed designs. Named after the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), which is recognized as a high point in Chinese culture and closely associated with Chinese-ness, the coat "looked ambiguously traditional" (71) and was described by a Chinese newspaper as expressing "both traditional Chinese flavor and modern ideals" (69). It was, as Jianhua Zhao puts it, "something new that appeared to be old" (73), a mixture of local and Western elements. The same could be said, of course, about the overall Chinese garment industry, which had grown dramatically in previous decades largely to fulfill Western demand for cheap clothes (such as blue jeans and t-shirts), as well as of the entire Chinese economy and society. China has indeed undergone a rapid modernization influenced by the West, but Zhao argues that "the growth of Chinese textile and apparel industries is not a simple modernization process that spread from the West to China" (39). Rather, China modernized and industrialized in a distinctly Chinese way, combining the old and the new in a unique blend symbolized by the *tangzhuang*. Both the designed coat and China's designed culture have been embraced by its people, although not without concerns about authenticity and not always as the government anticipated. For example, if the government

IMAGE 1.1 *Tangzhuang* in a shop.

intended to create a new national dress, it failed because the *tangzhuang* was a short-term craze that, ironically, settled into "a traditional dress for traditional holidays" (82).

Culture shapes everything that humans do, and a particular culture is conventionally attributed to a particular people and a particular place. Further, culture is often classified as "traditional" or "modern." However, neither of these assumptions survives the case of the Chinese *tangzhuang* nor of all the other cases of cultural contact, interaction, and borrowing in the contemporary world.

The twenty-first century (by Western time-reckoning; it is the fifteenth century by the Muslim calendar and the fifty-eighth century by the Hebrew calendar) is a complex era of difference and connectedness. The much-discussed processes of "globalization" have linked human communities without eliminating human diversity; in fact, in some ways they have created new kinds of diversity while injecting some elements of commonality. The local and particular still exists, in a system of global relationships, resulting in what some have called "glocalization" (more on this below). But above all else, the conditions of the contemporary world virtually guarantee that individuals will encounter and deal with others unlike themselves in various and significant ways. This makes awareness and appreciation of human diversity—and one's own place in that field of diversity—a critical issue. It is for exploring and explaining this diversity that anthropology was conceived.

CALENDARS AND CULTURES

THE SCIENCE(S) OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology has been called the science of humanity. That is a vast and noble calling, but a vague one and also not one that immediately distinguishes it from all the other human sciences. Psychology and sociology and history study humans, and even biology and physics can study humans. What makes anthropology different from, and a worthy addition to, these other disciplines?

Anthropology shares one factor with all of the other "social sciences": They all study human beings acting and interacting. However, all of the other social sciences only study *some kinds* of people or *some kinds of things* that people do. Economics studies economic behavior, political science studies

political behavior, etc. And above all, they tend to study the political, economic, or other behaviors of certain kinds of people—"modern," urban, industrialized, literate, usually "Western" people. But those are not the only people in the world. There are very many people today, and over the ages there has been a vast majority of people, who are not at all like Western people today. Yet they are people too. Why do they live the way they do? In fact, why do *we* live the way *we* do? In a word, why are there so many ways to be human? Those are the questions that anthropology asks.

Any science, from anthropology to zoology, is distinguished in three ways—its *questions,* its *perspective*, and its *method*. The questions of a science involve what it wants to know, why it was established in the first place, and what part of reality it is intended to examine. The perspective is its particular and unique way of looking at reality, the "angle" from which it approaches its subject, or the attitude it adopts toward it. Its method is the specific data-gathering activities it practices in order to apply its perspective and to answer its questions.

As a unique science, anthropology has its own distinctive questions, ones that no other science of humanity is already asking or has already answered. Some sciences, like psychology, suggest in their very name what their questions will be: psychology, from the Greek *psyche* meaning "mind" and *logos* meaning "word/study," declares its interest in the individual, internal and "mental," aspect of humans and human behavior. Sociology, from the Latin *socius* for "companion/ally/associate," implies the study of humans in groups. The name anthropology does not speak as clearly, and many readers, and many members of the public, may have little notion of what anthropology is or what anthropologists do. Anthropology is a fairly new word for a fairly new science, asking some fairly new questions. Derived from two Greek roots, *anthropos* for "man/human" and *logos*, anthropology was named and conceived as the study of humanity in both the biological and behavioral sense.

Anthropology's uniqueness is thankfully not in its name but in the questions it asks, which include:

- How many different ways are there to be human? That is, what is the range of human diversity?
- What are the commonalities across all of these different kinds of humans and human lifeways?
- Why are humans so diverse? What is the source or explanation of human diversity?
- How do the various elements of a particular human lifeway fit together?
- How do human groups and their lifeways interact with each other and change over time?

Given these questions, we can think of anthropology as not just the study of humans but the study of *human diversity*. Further, humans are diverse along two dimensions. The first dimension is the past versus the present; the second dimension is the physical versus the behavioral, our bodies as opposed to the ways we organize ourselves and act. Therefore, the definition of anthropology can be refined or expanded to *the study of the diversity of human bodies and behavior in the past and the present.* We can now see that there are several possible subfields of anthropology, depending on exactly what area of this diversity each focuses on—what specific anthropological questions it seeks to answer. These subdisciplines give anthropology its familiar "four-fields" character.

Physical or biological anthropology

Physical or biological anthropology is the area that specializes in *the diversity of human bodies in the past and present.* It is plain to see that humans differ in their physical appearance: We have different skin colors, different hair colors, different body shapes, different facial forms, etc. What can we hope to learn from it? First and foremost, we learn that *there is more than one way physically to be human*. All of the various human body shapes and facial features are human. Physical anthropologists can also relate those physical traits to the natural environment: Is there a reason why people in some parts of the world, in some climates for instance, have this or that physical characteristic? This is the question of physical adaptation, and it is entirely possible that a group, if it has lived in a particular environment long enough, could develop traits that fit well in that environment. Finally, physical anthropologists can discover things about human migrations, intermarriages, and such phenomena from the distribution of traits like blood type, gene frequency,

Physical anthropology
the study of the diversity of human bodies in the past and present, including physical adaptation, group or "race" characteristics, and human evolution

See Chapter 3

and so on. We will return to the question of "race and ethnicity" below.

In addition to the present diversity of human bodies, there is considerable historical diversity as well. The evidence indicates overwhelmingly that humans have not always had the bodies we have today. This evidence is fossils. Anthropologists have found no human bodies quite like ours that are older than a couple of hundred thousand years at most, and even during that time there were other "humans" who looked remarkably different from us. If you saw a Neandertal (who lived between 130,000 and 40,000 years ago) on the street today, you would recognize him or her as human but not exactly "normally" human. As we look further back in time, human-like beings become progressively less human-like while still retaining certain critical human features, like upright walking, a relatively large brain, and a human-like face. How then did we humans come to have the bodies that we have today, and what other forms did our human ancestors take in the past on their way to becoming us? That too is a question for physical anthropology—the question of human evolution. Some scientists even specialize in the physical characteristics of other species that are similar and related to our own, the primates, for which their science is called **primatology**. We will touch on the subject of human evolution later.

See Chapter 6

Primatology
the study of the physical and behavioral characteristics of the category of species called primates

Archaeology
the study of the diversity of human behavior in the past, based on the traces left behind by past humans or societies

Artifacts
physical objects created by humans, often specifically the "portable" objects like tools, pottery, jewelry, etc. (as opposed to the non-portable ones like buildings and roads, etc.)

Features
in archaeology, the large and non-portable objects or structures created and left by humans, including walls, buildings, roads, canals, and so on

See Chapter 2

Ecofacts
the environmental remains from past human social contexts, including wood, seeds, pollen, animal bones, shells, etc.

Archaeology

One popular image of the anthropologist is a sort of Indiana Jones character, a researcher who digs up pyramids in Egypt or ancient cities in Mexico. In fact, the researchers who conduct this kind of work are archaeologists. From the root *archae* for "beginning," **archaeology** is *the study of the diversity of human behavior in the past*. Archaeologists may do their work in the company of physical anthropologists, who examine the actual anatomical remains of past humans. However, the archaeologists do not focus on the bodies, but on the behaviors of those humans. How can they do that, when the people are all dead and their ways of life have vanished? The answer is that they examine the things those humans left behind. Archaeologists divide this evidence roughly into two categories—artifacts and features. **Artifacts** are the more or less portable objects that people made and used; things like pottery, clothing, jewelry, tools and weapons, and the like are considered artifacts. **Features** are the larger, more or less immovable objects like buildings, walls, monuments, canals, roads, farms, and such. To understand more about the environmental setting of these societies and how the humans made use of them, archaeologists also consider **ecofacts** such as plant (wood, seeds, pits, pollen) and animal (bones, shells) remains.

IMAGE 1.2 Archaeologists study the sites of past societies, such as Teotihuacan near Mexico City.

BOX 1.1 MUMMIES, MATERIALITY, AND MEANING

Despite differences in subject-matter and method that have threatened to divorce archaeology from cultural anthropology, the two kindred subdisciplines emerged from a shared commitment to material objects and their collection and display, and cultural anthropology has come once again to value materiality—the expression of culture in physical objects and the role that objects play in social action and meaning. A quintessential archaeological object is the mummy, which blurs the line between person and thing. However, Christina Riggs makes the surprising assertion that Western emphasis on the personhood of the mummy may betray the ancient Egyptians' own understanding of it as both thing and trans-person. The inclination of nineteenth-century discoverers was to unwrap a mummy to expose the person inside, discarding or destroying its linen wrap. This "scientific" practice failed to grasp that "the wrapping was as important as what was wrapped" (2014: 23), which "offers an entirely different perspective on the ancient Egyptian worldview" (79). Mummification, she contends, was "a fundamental transformation of the human body's own materiality," explicitly intended to "make it less human, more divine" (89). Mummification was not about preserving but about *transforming* the person: A human being looked like a statue in the end (and statues too were ritually wrapped and unwrapped), the linen functioning as the body's "new skin, muscle, and tissue, so that textile and object—or textile and body—became a unity" (140). This new appreciation of the role of linen leads Riggs to explore the cultural processes by which linen was manufactured and used in ancient Egypt, as well as its social and ritual meaning, noting for instance that many temples had in-house linen workshops.

Studying artifacts and features is fascinating, but archaeologists do not study them just to learn about them. They excavate and interpret this evidence to discover the thoughts, the ideas, the feelings, and the social patterns of the people who fashioned them. How did those past people make these things? Why did they make them? How did they use them? What did the objects mean to the makers and users? Archaeologists try to go from the objects themselves to the minds and hearts of the people who lived among those objects long ago. It is a creative, interpretive activity, but the artifacts and features are often the only traces that those people and their ways of lives have bequeathed to us.

Archaeologists do not look exclusively at the ancient past. They can also study the recent past, such as medieval Europe or colonial America. And since modern humans also make and leave remains behind them, archaeologists have found that their methods can be practiced on living societies to learn how contemporary humans exploit and affect their environments. One recent form of this work has been dubbed **garbology**, since it sifts through contemporary trash to discover what kinds of objects humans produce, consume, and discard today.

Linguistic anthropology

Linguistic anthropology focuses on *the diversity of human language in the past and present*. Linguistic anthropologists study the similarities and differences between living languages, looking into their grammar, their vocabulary, and their everyday use. This will not only shed light on each language but also on the possible relationships between languages. Are there, for instance, language "families" that are related historically, by migration or intermixing or other processes? Linguistic anthropologists also investigate changes within a language over time. Anyone who has read Shakespeare or even older English literature knows that English has evolved fairly dramatically over recent centuries. All languages undergo similar processes, and linguistic anthropologists analyze the reasons for and the particular directions of this change. They may also attempt to reconstruct "ancestral" languages—

Linguistic anthropology
the study of the diversity of human language in the past and present, and its relationship to social groups, practices, and values

Garbology
the study of contemporary trash to examine how humans make, consume, and discard material objects in the present

ones that link, say, English to German and both to ancient Greek or Sanskrit—even to the point of reconstructing the very first language.

More essentially, linguistic anthropology attempts to understand language use in relation to social life and social practices. How are values and concepts captured in and expressed by language? How does language structure and communicate social differences, for example of status and rank or age or gender, etc.? Linguistic anthropology has increasingly emphasized the element of "performance" in language, discovering specialized forms for various purposes (for example, speech-making as opposed to story-telling) and the role of language in forming and maintaining social relationships, including power relationships. Language in the anthropological perspective will be the subject of another chapter.

See Chapter 4

Cultural anthropology

Cultural anthropology
the study of the diversity of human behavior in the present

Cultural anthropology, also sometimes called (yet different from) social anthropology, is *the study of the diversity of human behavior in the present*. The large majority of anthropologists are cultural or social anthropologists, and they have one tremendous advantage over both physical anthropologists and archaeologists: They have living people to talk to. The goal of cultural anthropology is still to learn about the thoughts, feelings, action, and institutions of people, but now we can ask them, "Why did you do that?" or "How did you make that?" or "What does that mean to you?" Cultural anthropology is the activity that many people associate with *National Geographic* magazine, the Discover Channel, or similar media, where strange-looking (to us) people are portrayed doing exotic or unfamiliar or maybe even shocking (to us) things. Of course, observers can appreciate the sheer spectacle of such people and their behavior, but cultural anthropology is more than the observation and collection of behavioral curiosities. It is about making humans unlike oneself seem less "exotic" and more human—in fact, every bit as human as each of us. It is about getting to the heart and mind of people very different in at least some ways from oneself. But it is also about getting to one's own heart and mind, since "we" are one of the diverse kinds of human as surely as "they" are. In so doing, cultural anthropology penetrates to the very nature of humanity. What separates one kind of human from another yet unites us all? What makes one group's way of life different from another group's and yet similar and related?

Please remember, as the first lesson in cultural anthropology, that while others may appear strange and incomprehensible, even abnormal, to us, we may appear just as strange, incomprehensible, and abnormal to them.

TRADITIONAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND BEYOND

We have now seen the traditional four subfields of anthropology. However, in important ways, anthropology has outgrown this narrow categorization, if it was ever actually constrained by it. For instance, a number of well-developed subdisciplines have emerged under the general heading of cultural anthropology, including, among others:

- Urban anthropology, or the study of humans in urban settings, the effects of urbanization on previously non-urban societies, and the relationships between cities and their surrounding hinterlands (such as labor migration).
- Medical anthropology, or the study of knowledge systems and practices concerning health and medical treatment cross-culturally.
- Forensic anthropology, or the use of (mainly physical) anthropological knowledge and methods to solve crimes (e.g. identify murder victims, determine time and cause of death, etc.).
- Visual anthropology, or the study of the production, presentation, and use of material or "artistic" media such as painting, body art, clothing designs, and so on. It can include not only the arts that other societies make, but the arts that anthropology employs to study them, such as film and photography.
- Ethnomusicology, or the study of musical forms and their relation to culture.
- Ethnobotany, or the study of knowledge and uses of plants in various cultures.
- Development anthropology, or the study of as well as the practical contribution to how "modern" forces affect and change societies.

BOX 1.2 URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Most people associate anthropology with tribal societies in remote villages on some island or in some jungle, and much conventional anthropology has indeed been of the "village study" sort. As recently as 1980, Ulf Hannerz could claim that urban anthropology was little more than a decade old. But anthropology, as the study of human diversity, certainly *can* examine the city as a form of social behavior, and it *must* examine it, because cities have been part of human experience for thousands of years and because urbanization has finally brought the majority of humanity into cities. While sociology entered the city ahead of anthropology (and anthropologists duly acknowledge this), Alan and Josephine Smart found in their 2003 review of urban anthropology that the field had "made important contributions to our understanding of migration, housing, social and spatial organization, informal economies, and other topics" (2003: 267). Anthropology's explicit interest in urbanization began in colonial Africa, especially the "copperbelt" of Zambia where new cities arose and formerly non-urban people migrated. Anthropologists noticed new organizations and identities forming, such as mutual aid groups, trade unions, nationalist movements, and "supertribes" or what we would today call ethnic groups. However, critics often accused urban anthropology of perpetuating the village focus by examining communities or enclaves within the city—that is, doing anthropology "in the city" but not "of the city." In more recent years, urban anthropologists have investigated the city as a social system, finding great diversity inside as well as between cities; not all cities are alike, nor are all inhabitants of any particular city alike. They have also studied the links between cities and their non-urban surroundings, as well as between specific cities and the wider and global economic and cultural system.

URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

This can include attempting to minimize the negative impact of change on traditional societies and even in some cases advocating for the rights and wishes of those societies.

- Feminist anthropology, originally the study of women's issues and roles across cultures. This subfield has expanded to include gender issues and roles more generally, particularly how gender is defined, practiced, and controlled through language, values, and power.

It is important to understand that anthropology is not and never has been a purely "academic" pursuit, disconnected from the real world. In its pre-modern form it was to be found in the early European colonial encounters with non-Western peoples, providing data and often service in the colonial enterprise, for better or worse. Some of the first anthropologists, like Franz Boas (1858–1942) in his 1928 book, *Anthropology and Modern Life*, were deeply concerned with practical social issues, like racism, nationalism, eugenics, criminology, and education.

And of course, all anthropological findings can be used for real-world policy- and decision-making. But many anthropologists overtly practice a kind of "applied anthropology" intended to bring the concepts, perspectives, and methods of the science to non-academic initiatives (see discussion of anthropological careers below).

The continuing evolution of cultural anthropology

Who are the subjects of cultural anthropology's curiosity—what we sometimes call the "anthropological gaze"? The conventional impression (virtually the stereotype) of the science is that it is exclusively concerned with small, "traditional," even "primitive" groups. Actually, one of the great early anthropologists, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, defined anthropology as "the study of what are called primitive or backward peoples" (1965: 2). The equally esteemed E. E. Evans-Pritchard asserted that anthropology was the branch of social science, "which chiefly devotes itself to primitive societies" (1962: 11). However, Evans-Pritchard situated the emphasis on remote exotic peoples within the context of anthropology's greater subject, which

Boas, Franz. 1928. *Anthropology and Modern Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1965 [1952]. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press.

See Chapters 3 and 11–15

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1962. *Social Anthropology and Other Essays*. New York: The Free Press.

IMAGE 1.3
Anthropologists study the city as a distinct social system and way of life.

See Chapters 12–15

"embraces all human cultures and societies, including our own" (4).

If you consider the questions posed by anthropology generally and cultural anthropology specifically, you will immediately realize that there is nothing that limits them to any particular kinds of peoples or cultures. Accordingly, as the human world has changed—especially becoming more interconnected, more fluid, more "modernized"—cultural anthropology has changed too, partly because it can and partly because it must. Cultural anthropology was never really exclusively the study of small, isolated, traditional societies, although it did occupy the "savage slot" (Trouillot, 1991), for tactical reasons (because it is easier to analyze compact and unfamiliar cultures) and for the simple reason that no other science did. But anthropology cannot and does not aspire to remain in that slot, if only because there are no more isolated and "primitive" societies and arguably never were.

See Chapters 11–15

The three main phenomena that have forced a reconceptualization of cultural anthropology are colonialism, postcolonial independence and nationalist and indigenous movements, and modernization and globalization. Colonialism brought far-flung societies within a single political, economic, and cultural sphere, imposing changes and inequalities. Independence, nationalism, and indigenous movements have transformed the sometimes "passive" objects of anthropological scrutiny into active subjects, actors and producers of culture who speak for themselves. Finally, modernization and globalization have threatened and attempted to integrate cultures into a single world system, which is, Thomas Friedman (2005) notwithstanding, anything but "flat," if only because they are driven from centers of wealth and power and generate uneven outcomes. In the contemporary world, globalization is the most heralded cultural force, regarded as "processes that take place within [groups] but also transcend them, such that attention limited to local processes, identities, and units of analysis yields incomplete understanding of the local" (Kearney, 1995: 548). But the local does not disappear, nor is it bleached of all its distinctive characteristics; rather, in each location and occasion, a distinct combination or manifestation of the local and the global emerges, leading to a

result that some observers have wryly called **glocalization**, linking local or small-scale changes to large-scale or global factors. The message is that even within a global context, cultural realities are local, and therefore cultural anthropology's questions, perspectives, and methods still apply.

In response to "glocal" realities, some anthropologists have taken "big picture" approaches to the world, as in Eric Wolf's (1982) *Europe and the People without History* and the various works of Ernest Gellner (e.g. 1988). Others have explored specialized aspects of human behavior, such as war and conflict (e.g. Eller, 1999, 2005; Fujii, 2009; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004), globalization (e.g. Eriksen, 2014; Lewellen, 2002), consumption and shopping (e.g. Counihan and Van Esterick, 2007; Howes, 1996; Miller, 1998), environment and conservation (Guneratne, 2010; Igoe, 2004), homelessness (Finkelstein, 2005), natural disasters (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith, 2002), material culture like denim (Miller and Woodward, 2007, 2011) and lycra (O'Connor, 2011), and even psychedelic trance dance (St. John, 2010).

Glocalization
a combination of the words "globalization" and "local," suggests the unique local and situated forms and effects of wide-spread and even global processes

Wolf, Eric. 1982. *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

THE "ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE"

Cultural anthropology is distinct among sciences for the questions it asks, but it also stands out in its approach to or its way of thinking about its subject, that is, its perspective. The **anthropological perspective** has three components. The first is obvious, the second less obvious but fairly uncontroversial, and the third not at all obvious and quite controversial. They are:

1. comparative or cross-cultural study
2. holism
3. cultural relativism

Comparative or cross-cultural study

Cultural anthropology does not look at just one kind of culture, certainly not just the anthropologist's own kind of culture. A **cross-cultural** approach means that anthropologists are curious about human behavior in a wide and inclusive sense, embracing all human ways of being. Anthropologists are perhaps peculiarly interested in cultures that are *unlike* their own. After all, people already know their own culture pretty well—or think they do. One premise of human sciences is that most people in fact are not as aware of the causes and consequences of their own behavior as they often (or like to) think that they are. This is a reason why sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959) referred to the "sociological imagination": Researchers must learn to see meanings, rules, relationships, institutions, and such phenomena that are "invisible" to or outside the attention of group members even as those phenomena influence human behavior, individually and collectively. Therefore, one reason why cultural anthropology has insisted on a comparative perspective is that it is often easier to see what is unfamiliar than what is familiar; familiar things tend to be taken for granted or overlooked, whereas the unfamiliar demands attention. Anthropology, if anything, serves to question assumptions and to expose the taken-for-granted.

However, even if anthropologists knew their own culture very well, that would not be sufficient. Anthropologists, like all scientists, cannot use a sample of one to draw conclusions about other cases. Whether it is plants, planets, or people, it is not acceptable to assume that they are all alike. In fact, it is wise to assume exactly the opposite. Anybody who is truly interested in knowing and understanding humans needs a bigger sample than one. We cannot know ourselves, no matter how thoroughly, and claim that we know *humanity*. Actually, in almost every way, Western culture in general or American culture in particular is quite atypical and non-representative. But then, there is no "typical" culture. Since no culture pertains to all humans, or even a majority or close to it, every culture is a minority. *Whatever you do or think or feel, in the human world you are in the minority*.

So it should be apparent why cross-cultural or comparative study is a valuable part of anthropology. The first reason is that the diversity is there. There simply *are* other cultures than one's own. But more, by exposing ourselves to the plethora of human cultures, we can make two important discoveries:

- the commonalities or "universals" that occur across cultures—that is, is there anything that most or all cultures do, that seems to be *necessary* for humans?

Anthropological perspective
the unique "angle" or point of view of anthropology, consisting of cross-cultural or comparative study, holism, and cultural relativism

Cross-cultural study
the examination of a wide variety of societies when considering any particular cultural question, for purposes of comparison