What did you do today? Presumably, your first activity was to get out of bed—for some of us the most difficult task of the day. Shortly thereafter, you got dressed. What did you wear? That depended on both the weather (shorts or sweater) and the day’s activities (suit or T-shirt).

After work or school, you returned home (ranch house, apartment, or dorm room). You then ate dinner (pizza or salad). After studying or finishing some work, you may now have some free time during the evening for leisure activities (watching television, listening to music, or playing or watching sports).

This narrative may not precisely describe you, but you can recognize the day of a “typical” North American. However, the routine described and the choices mentioned in parentheses do not accurately reflect the practices of many people elsewhere in the world. People living in other locations often have extremely different social customs. Geographers ask why such differences exist and how social customs are related to the cultural landscape.

The need to understand differences in social customs has become more urgent with the increase in terrorist attacks. Al-Qaeda terrorists regard attacks against the United States and its allies as an attempt to withstand the onslaught of Western-dominated popular culture. Although condemning terrorist tactics, many others share al-Qaeda’s opposition to Western cultural dominance.

As you watch television in your single-family dwelling, wearing jeans and munching on a pizza, consider the impact if people from rural Botswana or Papua New Guinea were suddenly placed in the room. Despite striking differences in social customs across the landscape, you might be surprised to find that your visitors are familiar with most of your customs, as Earth becomes more and more a “global village.” Your visitors might be attracted within a short period of time to change their customs—or to strongly condemn yours.
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CASE STUDY

The Aboriginal Artists of Australia at Lincoln Center

The Aboriginal Artists of Australia, a group of Aborigines living in the isolated Australian interior, visited New York a few years ago and danced at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Their series of dances, handed down from their ancestors, reflected their customs and local landscape. They told how features of their landscape, such as hills and rivers, were created.

The Aboriginal dancers challenged their New York audience to understand the meanings of their movements and music. Aborigines consider such dances an essential social custom, reflecting their daily experiences and activities, such as the need for rain or the behavior of particular animals. At best, the New York audience could recognize that the dances were meaningful to the Aborigines. But understanding was inevitably limited by the lack of a comparable role for dance in Western customs.

The geographic contrast between the Aboriginal dancers and the New York theater audience was heightened by differing attitudes toward the physical environment. The Aboriginal dancers respond to specific landscape features and environmental conditions in their Australian homeland. In contrast, New York’s Lincoln Center is not a product of an isolated and unique set of social customs. Nothing at Lincoln Center is indigenous to the unique conditions of the site—not the arrangement of structures, the building materials, the variety of performances, or the performers’ places of origin. Lincoln Center reflects the diffusion of social customs across a large portion of Earth’s surface. Lincoln Center exemplifies how regional differences in social and physical characteristics become less important in the distribution of cultural activities, through interaction and integration.

In Chapter 1, culture was shown to combine three things—values, material artifacts, and political institutions. Geographers are interested in all three components of the definition of culture. They search for where these various elements of culture are found in the world and for reasons why the observed distributions occur.

This chapter deals with the material artifacts of culture, the visible objects that a group possesses and leaves behind for the future. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examine three important components of a group’s beliefs and values, including language, religion, and ethnicity. Chapter 8 concludes the emphasis on the cultural elements of human geography by looking at the political institutions that maintain values and protect their artifacts.

Culture follows logically from the discussion of migration in Chapter 3. Two locations have similar cultural beliefs, objects, and institutions because people bring along their culture when they migrate. Differences emerge when two groups have limited interaction.

In this chapter, two facets of material culture are examined. First is material culture deriving from the survival activities of everyone’s daily life—food, clothing, and shelter. Each cultural group provides these in its own way. Second is culture involving leisure activities—the arts and recreation. Each cultural group has its own definition of meaningful art and stimulating recreation.

Culture can be distinguished from habit and custom. A habit is a repetitive act that a particular individual performs, such as wearing jeans to class every day. A custom is a repetitive act of a group, performed to the extent that it becomes characteristic of the group—American university students wear jeans to class every day. Unlike custom, habit does not imply that the act has been adopted by most of the society’s population. A custom is therefore a habit that has been widely adopted by a group of people.

A collection of social customs produces a group’s material culture—jeans typically represent American informality and a badge of youth. In this chapter, custom may be used to denote a specific element of material culture, such as wearing jeans, whereas culture refers to a group’s entire collection of customs.

Material culture falls into two basic categories that differ according to scale—folk and popular. Folk culture is traditionally practiced primarily by small, homogeneous groups living in isolated rural areas and may include a custom such as wearing a sarong (a loose skirt made of a long strip of cloth wrapped around the body) in Malaysia or a sari (a long cloth draped so that one end forms a skirt and the other a head or shoulder covering) in India. Popular culture is found in large, heterogeneous societies that share certain habits (such as wearing jeans) despite differences in other personal characteristics. The scale of territory covered by a folk culture is typically much smaller than that covered by a popular culture.

Geographers focus on two aspects of where folk and popular cultures are located in space. First, each cultural activity, like wearing jeans, has a distinctive spatial distribution. Geographers study a particular social custom’s origin, its diffusion, and its integration with other social characteristics. Second, geographers study the relation between material culture and the physical environment. Each cultural group takes particular elements from
the environment into its culture and in turn constructs landscapes (what geographers call "built environments") that modify nature in distinctive ways.

Geographers observe that popular culture has a more widespread distribution than folk culture. The reason why the distributions are different is interaction, or lack of it. A group develops distinctive customs from experiencing local social and physical conditions in a place that is isolated from other groups. Even groups living in proximity may generate a variety of folk customs in a limited geographic area, because of limited communication. Landscapes dominated by a collection of folk customs change relatively little over time.

In contrast, popular culture is based on rapid simultaneous global connections through communications systems, transportation networks, and other modern technology. Rapid diffusion facilitates frequent changes in popular customs. Thus, folk culture is more likely to vary from place to place at a given time, whereas popular culture is more likely to vary from time to time at a given place.

In Earth's globalization, popular culture is becoming more dominant, threatening the survival of unique folk cultures. These folk customs—along with language, religion, and ethnicity—provide a unique identity to each group of people who occupy a specific region of Earth's surface. The disappearance of local folk customs reduces local diversity in the world and the intellectual stimulation that arises from differences in backgrounds.

The dominance of popular culture can also threaten the quality of the environment. Folk culture derived from local natural elements may be more sensitive to the protection and enhancement of the environment. Popular culture is less likely to reflect the diversity of local physical conditions and is more likely to modify the environment in accordance with global values.

**KEY ISSUE 1**

**Where Do Folk and Popular Cultures Originate and Diffuse?**

- Origin of folk and popular cultures
- Diffusion of folk and popular cultures

Each social custom has a unique spatial distribution, but in general, distribution is more extensive for popular culture than for folk culture. Two basic factors help explain the spatial differences between popular and folk cultures—the process of origin and the pattern of diffusion.

**Origin of Folk and Popular Cultures**

A social custom originates at a hearth, a center of innovation. Folk customs often have anonymous hearths, originating from anonymous sources, at unknown dates, through unidentified originators. They may also have multiple hearths, originating independently in isolated locations.

In contrast to folk customs, popular culture is most often a product of the economically more developed countries (MDCs), especially North America, Western Europe, and Japan. Popular music and fast food are good examples. They arise from a combination of advances in industrial technology and increased leisure time. Industrial technology permits the uniform reproduction of objects in large quantities (CDs, T-shirts, pizzas). Many of these objects help people enjoy leisure time, which has increased as a result of the widespread change for the labor force from predominantly agricultural work to predominantly service and manufacturing jobs.

**Origin of Folk Music**

Music exemplifies the differences in the origins of folk and popular culture. According to a Chinese legend, music was invented in 2697 B.C., when the Emperor Huang Ti sent Ling Lun to cut bamboo poles that would produce a sound matching the call of the phoenix bird. But in reality, folk songs are usually composed anonymously and transmitted orally. A song may be modified from one generation to the next as conditions change, but the content is most often derived from events in daily life that are familiar to the majority of the people.

Folk songs tell a story or convey information about daily activities such as farming, life-cycle events (birth, death, and marriage), or mysterious events such as storms and earthquakes. In Vietnam, where most people are subsistence farmers, information about agricultural technology is conveyed through folk songs. For example, the following folk song provides advice about the difference between seeds planted in summer and seeds planted in winter:

*Ma chiều ba tháng không giàu
Ma mùa tháng rồi lại lười không non*¹

This song can be translated as follows:

> While seedlings for the summer crop are not old when they are three months of age,
> Seedlings for the winter crop are certainly not young when they are one-and-a-half months old.

The song hardly sounds lyrical to a Western ear. But when English-language folk songs appear in cold print, similar themes emerge, even if the specific information conveyed about the environment differs.

**Origin of Popular Music**

In contrast to folk music, popular music is written by specific individuals for the purpose of being sold to a large number of people. It displays a high degree of technical skill and is frequently capable of being performed only in a studio with electronic equipment.

Popular music as we know it today originated around 1900. At that time, the main popular musical entertainment in the United States and Western Europe was the vaudeville show, which was known as the "music box" in the United Kingdom and "vaudeville" in the United States. To provide songs for music halls and vaudeville, a music industry was developed in New York, along 28th Street between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue (now Avenue of the Americas), a district that became known as Tin Pan Alley (Figure 4-1). The name derived from the sound of pianos being furiously pounded by people called song pluggers, who were demonstrating tunes to publishers.

Tin Pan Alley was home to songwriters, music publishers, orchestra directors, and arrangers. Companies in Tin Pan Alley originally tried to sell as many printed song sheets as possible, although sales of recordings ultimately became the most important measure of success. The location of Tin Pan Alley later moved uptown to Broadway and 32nd Street and then along Broadway between 42nd and 50th streets. After World War II, Tin Pan Alley disappeared as recorded music became more important than printed song sheets.

The diffusion of American popular music worldwide began in earnest during World War II, when the Armed Forces Radio Network broadcast music to American soldiers and to citizens of countries where American forces were stationed or fighting. English became the international language for popular music. Today popular musicians in Japan, Poland, Russia, and other countries often write and perform in English, even though few people in their audiences understand the language.

Hip hop is a more recent form of popular music that also originated in New York. Whereas the music industry of Tin Pan Alley originated in Manhattan office buildings, hip hop originated in the late 1970s in the South Bronx, a neighborhood predominantly populated by low-income African American and Puerto Rican people (a changeover from its predominant population of middle-class white people of European origin) (Figure 4-2). Rappers in other low-income New York City neighborhoods of Queens, Brooklyn, and Harlem adopted the style with local twists—"thug" rap in Queens and clever lines in Brooklyn. Hip hop remained predominantly a New York phenomenon until the late 1980s when it spread to Oakland and Atlanta, and then to other large cities in the South, Midwest, and West.

Hip hop demonstrates well the interplay between globalization and local diversity that is a prominent theme of this book. On the one hand, hip hop is a return to a very local form of music expression rather than a form that is studio manufactured. Lyrics make local references and represent a distinctive hometown scene. The KRS-One song "The Bridge Is Over," for example, was a slam by a South Bronx rapper against Queens (located on the other side of the bridge from the Bronx). At the same time, hip hop has diffused rapidly around the world through instruments of globalization: the music is broadcast online and sold through Web marketing. Artists are expressing a sense of a specific place across the boundless space of the Internet.

**Diffusion of Folk and Popular Cultures**

The broadcasting of American popular music on Armed Forces Radio during the 1940s and online today illustrates the difference in diffusion of folk and popular cultures. The spread of popular culture typically follows the process of hierarchical diffusion from hearths or nodes of innovation. In the United States, prominent nodes of innovation for popular culture include Hollywood, California, for the film industry and Madison Avenue in New York City for advertising agencies. Popular culture diffuses rapidly and extensively through the use of modern communications and transportation.

In contrast, folk culture is transmitted from one location to another more slowly and on a smaller scale, primarily through migration rather than electronic communication. One reason why hip hop music is classified as popular rather than folk...
music is that it diffuses primarily through electronics. In contrast, the spread of folk culture is effected through relocation diffusion, the spread of a characteristic through migration.

The Amish: Relocation Diffusion of Folk Culture

Amish customs illustrate how relocation diffusion distributes folk culture. The Amish have distinctive clothing, farming, religious practices, and other customs. They leave a unique pattern on landscapes where they settle. Shunning mechanical and electrical power, the Amish still travel by horse and buggy and continue to use hand tools for farming.

Although the Amish population in the United States numbers only about 80,000, a mere 0.03 percent of the total population, Amish folk culture remains visible on the landscape in at least 17 states. The distribution of Amish folk culture across a major portion of the U.S. landscape is explained by examining the diffusion of their culture through migration.

In the 1600s a Swiss Mennonite bishop named Jakob Ammann gathered a group of followers who became known as the Amish. The Amish originated in Bern, Switzerland; Alsace in northeastern France; and the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany. They migrated to other regions of northwestern Europe in the 1700s, primarily for religious freedom. In Europe the Amish did not develop distinctive language, clothing, or farming practices and gradually merged with various Mennonite church groups.

Several hundred Amish families migrated to North America in two waves. The first group, primarily from Bern and the

FIGURE 4-2 Mental map of hip hop (Dave One). The map attempts to place prominent hip hop performers in proximity to similar performers as well as in the region of the country (Northeast, South, Midwest, West) where they performed or drew inspiration.
Palatinate, settled in Pennsylvania in the early 1700s, enticed by William Penn's offer of low-priced land. Because of lower land prices, the second group, from Alsace, settled in Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa in the United States and Ontario, Canada, in the early 1800s. From these core areas, groups of Amish migrated to other locations where inexpensive land was available.

Living in rural and frontier settlements relatively isolated from other groups, Amish communities retained their traditional customs, even as other European immigrants to the United States adopted new ones. We can observe Amish customs on the landscape in such diverse areas as southeastern Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, and east-central Iowa (Figure 4–3). These communities are relatively isolated from each other but share cultural traditions distinct from those of other Americans.

Amish folk culture continues to diffuse slowly through interregional migration within the United States. In recent years a number of Amish families have sold their farms in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—the oldest and at one time largest Amish community in the United States—and migrated to Christian and Todd counties in southwestern Kentucky.

According to Amish tradition, every son is given a farm when he is an adult, but land suitable for farming is expensive and hard to find in Lancaster County because of its proximity to growing metropolitan areas. With the average price of farmland in southwestern Kentucky less than one-fifth that in Lancaster County, an Amish family can sell its farm in Pennsylvania and acquire enough land in Kentucky to provide adequate farmland for all their sons. Amish families are also migrating from Lancaster County to escape the influx of tourists who come from the nearby metropolitan areas to gawk at the distinctive folk culture.

**Sports: Hierarchical Diffusion of Popular Culture**

In contrast with the diffusion of folk customs, organized sports provide examples of how popular culture is diffused. Many sports originated as isolated folk customs and were diffused like other folk culture, through the migration of individuals. The contemporary diffusion of organized sports, however, displays the characteristics of popular culture.

**FOLK CULTURE ORIGIN OF SOCCER.** Soccer is the world’s most popular sport (it is called football outside North America). Its origin is obscure, although the earliest documented contest took place in England in the eleventh century. According to football historians, after the Danish invasion of England between 1018 and 1042, workers excavating a building site encountered a Danish soldier’s head, which they began to kick. “Kick the Dane’s head” was imitated by boys, one of whom got the idea of using an inflated cow bladder.

Early football games resembled mob scenes. A large number of people from two villages would gather to kick the ball. The winning side was the one that kicked the ball into the center of the rival village. In the twelfth century the game—by then commonly called football—was confined to smaller vacant areas, and the rules became standardized. Because football disrupted village life, King Henry II banned the game from England in the late twelfth century. It was not legalized again until 1603 by King James I. At this point, football was an English folk custom rather than a global popular custom.
GLOBALIZATION OF SOCCER. The transformation of football from an English folk custom to global popular culture began in the 1800s. Football and other recreation clubs were founded in Britain, frequently by churches, to provide factory workers with organized recreation during leisure hours. Sport became a subject that was taught in school.

Increasing leisure time permitted people not only to view sporting events but also to participate in them. With higher incomes, spectators paid to see first-class events. To meet public demand, football clubs began to hire professional players. Several British football clubs formed an association in 1863 to standardize the rules and to organize professional leagues. Organization of the sport into a formal structure in Great Britain marks the transition of football from folk to popular culture.

The word soccer originated after 1863, when supporters of the game formed the Football Association. Association was shortened to assoc, which ultimately became twisted around into the word soccer. The terms soccer and association football also helped to distinguish the game from rugby football, which permits both kicking and carrying of the ball. Rugby originated in 1823, when a football player at Rugby School (in Rugby, England) picked up the ball and ran with it.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the British exported association football around the world, first to continental Europe and then to other countries. Football was first played in continental Europe in the late 1870s by Dutch students who had been in Britain. The game was diffused to other countries through contact with English players. For example, football went to Spain via English engineers working in Bilbao in 1893 and was quickly adopted by local miners. British citizens further diffused the game throughout the worldwide British Empire. In the twentieth century, soccer, like other sports, was further diffused by new communication systems, especially radio and television.

Soccer diffused to Russia when the English manager of a textile factory near Moscow organized a team at the factory in 1887 and advertised in London for workers who could play football. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, both the factory and its football team were absorbed into the Soviet Electric Trade Union. The team, renamed the Moscow Dynamo, became the country’s most famous, although the official history of Soviet football never acknowledged its English origin.

Although soccer was also exported to the United States, it never gained the popularity it won in Europe and Latin America. The first college football game played in the United States, between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869, was really soccer, and officials of several colleges met 4 years later to adopt football rules consistent with those of British soccer. But Harvard’s representatives successfully argued for adoption of rugby rules instead. Rugby was so thoroughly modified by U.S. colleges that an entirely new game—American football—emerged. Similar modifications of football were undertaken in other English-speaking countries, including Canada, Australia, and Ireland. This complex tale of diffusion is typical of many popular customs.

SPORTS IN POPULAR CULTURE. Each country has its own preferred sports. Cricket is popular primarily in Britain and former British colonies. Ice hockey prevails, logically, in colder climates, especially in Canada, Northern Europe, and Russia. The most popular sports in China are martial arts, known as wushu, including archery, fencing, wrestling, and boxing. Baseball, once confined to North America, became popular in Japan after it was introduced by American soldiers who occupied the country after World War II.

Lacrosse has fostered cultural identity among the Iroquois Confederation of Six Nations (Cayugas, Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Senecas, and Tuscaroras) who live in the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada. As early as 1636, European explorers observed the Iroquois playing lacrosse, known in their language as gahobigwaha, which means “bump hips.” European colonists in Canada picked up the game from the Iroquois and diffused it to a handful of U.S. communities, especially in Maryland, upstate New York, and Long Island. The name lacrosse derived from the French words la croix, for a bishop’s crosier or staff, which has a similar shape to the lacrosse stick.

In recent years, the International Lacrosse Federation invited the Iroquois nation to participate in the Lacrosse World Championships, along with teams from Australia, Canada, England, and the United States. Although the Iroquois have not won, they have had the satisfaction of hearing their national anthem played and seeing their flag fly alongside those of the other participants.

Despite the diversity in distribution of sports across Earth’s surface and the anonymous origin of some games, organized
spectator sports today are part of popular culture. The common element in professional sports is the willingness of people throughout the world to pay for the privilege of viewing, in person or on TV, events played by professional athletes. Competition for the World Cup in soccer is clear evidence of the global diffusion of sports. National soccer teams worldwide compete every 4 years, including in Germany in 2006 and South Africa in 2010. Thanks to television, the final match is viewed by more spectators than any other event in history.

KEY ISSUE 2

Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

- Isolation promotes cultural diversity
- Influence of the physical environment

Folk culture typically has unknown or multiple origins among groups living in relative isolation. Folk culture diffuses slowly to other locations through the process of migration. A combination of physical and cultural factors influences the distinctive distributions of folk culture.

Isolation Promotes Cultural Diversity

A group’s unique folk customs develop through centuries of relative isolation from customs practiced by other cultural groups. As a result, folk customs observed at a point in time vary widely from one place to another, even among nearby places.

Himalayan Art

In a study of artistic customs in the Himalaya Mountains, geographers P. Karan and Cutton Mather demonstrated that distinctive views of the physical environment emerge among neighboring cultural groups that are isolated. The study area, a narrow corridor of 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles) in the Himalaya Mountains of Bhutan, Nepal, northern India, and southern Tibet (China), contains four religious groups: Tibetan Buddhists in the north, Hindus in the south, Muslims in the west, and Southeast Asian animists in the east (Figure 4-4). Despite their spatial proximity, limited interaction among these groups produces distinctive folk customs.

Through their choices of subjects of paintings, each group reveals how their folk culture mirrors their religions and individual views of their environment:

- Tibetan Buddhists in the northern region paint idealized divine figures, such as monks and saints. Some of these figures are depicted as bizarre or terrifying, perhaps reflecting the inhospitable environment.
- Hindus in the southern region create scenes from everyday life and familiar local scenes. Their paintings sometimes portray a deity in a domestic scene and frequently represent the region’s violent and extreme climatic conditions.
- Paintings by Muslims in the Islamic western portion show the region’s beautiful plants and flowers, because the Muslim faith prohibits displaying animate objects in art. In contrast with the paintings from the Buddhist and Hindu regions, these paintings do not depict harsh climatic conditions.
- Animist groups from Myanmar (Burma) and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, who have migrated to the eastern region of the study area, paint symbols and designs that derive from their religion rather than from the local environment.

The distribution of artistic subjects in the Himalayas shows how folk customs are influenced by cultural institutions like religion and by environmental processes such as climate, landforms, and vegetation. These groups display similar uniqueness in their dance, music, architecture, and crafts.

Influence of the Physical Environment

Recall from Chapter 1 that environmental determinists theorized how processes in the environment cause social customs. This may sound reasonable on the surface, but most contemporary geographers reject the idea. Many examples exist of peoples who live in similar environments but adopt different

![Figure 4-4 Cultural regions in the Himalaya Mountains. Cultural geographers P. Karan and Cutton Mather found four cultural areas in the rugged Himalayan region of Bhutan, Nepal, and northern India. Variations among the four groups were found in painting, dance, and other folk customs.](image)
social customs. Conversely, many examples exist of peoples who live under different environmental conditions but adopt similar social customs. Of course, people respond to their environment, but the environment is only one of several controls over social customs.

Customs such as provision of food, clothing, and shelter are clearly influenced by the prevailing climate, soil, and vegetation. For example, residents of arctic climates may wear fur-lined boots, which protect against the cold, and snowshoes, with which to walk on soft, deep snow without sinking in. On the other hand, people living in warm and humid climates may not need any footwear if heavy rainfall and time spent in water discourage such use. The custom in the Netherlands of wearing wooden shoes may appear quaint, but it actually derives from environmental conditions. Dutch farmers wear the wooden shoes, which are waterproof, as they work in fields that often are extremely wet because much of the Netherlands is below sea level.

Environmental conditions can limit the variety of human actions anywhere, but folk societies are particularly responsive to the environment because of their low level of technology and the prevailing agricultural economy. People living in folk cultures are likely to be farmers growing their own food, using hand tools and animal power.

Yet folk culture may ignore the environment. Not all arctic residents wear snowshoes, nor do all people in wet temperate climates wear wooden shoes. Geographers observe that broad differences in folk culture arise in part from physical conditions and that these conditions produce varied customs.

Two necessities of daily life—food and shelter—demonstrate the influence of cultural values and the environment on the development of unique folk culture. Different folk societies prefer different foods and styles of house construction.

### Distinctive Food Preferences

Folk food habits derive from the environment. According to nineteenth-century geographer Vidal de la Blache, “Among the connections that tie [people] to a certain environment, one of the most tenacious is food supply; clothing and weapons are more subject to modification than the dietary regime, which experience has shown to be best suited to human needs in a given climate.”

**PAYING ATTENTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT.** Humans eat mostly plants and animals—living things that spring from the soil and water of a region. Inhabitants of a region must consider the soil, climate, terrain, vegetation, and other characteristics of the environment in deciding to produce particular foods. For example, rice demands a milder, moist climate, whereas wheat thrives in colder, drier regions.

People adapt their food preferences to conditions in the environment. A good example is soybeans, which are an excellent source of protein and are widely grown in Asia. In the raw state they are toxic and indigestible. Lengthy cooking renders them edible, but fuel is scarce in Asia. Asians have adapted to this environmental dilemma by deriving foods from soybeans that do not require extensive cooking. These include bean sprouts (germinated seeds), soy sauce (fermented soybeans), and bean curd (steamed soybeans).

In 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 over fires, which also provided home heat in the colder climate.

The contribution of a location’s distinctive physical features to the way food tastes is known by the French term terroir. The word comes from the same root as terre (French word for land or

![Food customs. A family in Senegal eats their lunch. A meal in Senegal is often served in a deep enamel bowl, large enough for several people to share. Food is retrieved from the bowl using three fingers of the right hand.](image-url)
earth), but terroir does not translate precisely into English; it has a similar meaning to the English expressions “grounded” or “sense of place.” Terroir is the sum of the effects of the local environment on a particular food item. The term is frequently used to refer to the combination of soil, climate, and other physical features that contribute to the distinctive taste of a wine.

Bostans, which are small gardens inside Istanbul, Turkey, have been supplying the city with fresh produce for hundreds of years (Figure 4–5). According to geographer Paul Kaldjian, Istanbul has around 1,000 bostans, run primarily by immigrants from Cide, a rural village in Turkey’s Kastamonu province.

Bostan farmers are able to maximize yields from their small plots of land (typically 1 hectare) through what Kaldjian calls clever and efficient manipulation of space, season, and resources. Fifteen to twenty different types of vegetables are planted at different times of the year, and the choice is varied from year to year, in order to reduce the risk of damage from poor weather.

Most of the work is done by older men, who prepare beds for planting, sow, irrigate, and operate motorized equipment, according to Kaldjian. Women weed, and both men and women harvest.

**FOOD DIVERSITY IN TRANSYLVANIA.** Food customs are inevitably affected by the availability of products, but people do not simply eat what is available in their particular environment. Food habits are strongly influenced by cultural traditions. What is eaten establishes one’s social, religious, and ethnic memberships. The surest way to identify a family’s ethnic origins is to look in its kitchen.

In Transylvania, currently part of Romania, food preferences distinguish among groups who have long lived in close proximity. A century ago, before killings and emigrations during the World War II era, Transylvania contained about 4 million Hungarians; 3 million Romanians; 500,000 to 600,000 Saxons; 50,000 to 75,000 Jews; 20,000 to 25,000 Armenians; and several thousand Szeklers. The Saxons and Szeklers were German peoples who migrated to Transylvania in the ninth century. The Hungarians conquered Transylvania in 1003 and ruled it with few interruptions until losing it to Romania after World War I. Most Jews came to the region with the Hungarians. Most of the Armenians migrated to Transylvania in the 1600s to escape the Muslim-controlled Ottoman Empire to the southeast.

Soup, the food consumed by poorer people, shows the distinctive traditions of the neighboring cultural groups in Transylvania. Romanians made sour bran soups from cracked wheat, corn, brown bread, and cherry tree twigs. Saxons instead simmered fatty pork in water, added sauerkraut or vinegar, and often used fruits. Jews preferred soups made from beets and sorrel (a leafy vegetable) rather than from meat. Armenians made soup based on churut (curdled milk) and ground vegetables. Hungarians added smoked bacon to the soup and thickened it with flour and onion fried in lard. Szeklers—who adopted many Jewish dietary practices, including the avoidance of pork products—substituted smoked goose or other poultry for the bacon in the Hungarian recipes.

Distinctive food preferences among groups from Transylvania have continued, even after many migrated to the United States. Long after dress, manners, and speech have become indistinguishable from those of the majority, old food habits often continue as the last vestige of traditional folk customs.

**FOOD ATTRACTIONS AND TABOOS.** According to many folk customs, everything in nature carries a signature, or distinctive characteristic, based on its appearance and natural properties. Consequently, people may desire or avoid certain foods in response to perceived beneficial or harmful natural traits.

Certain foods are eaten because their natural properties are perceived to enhance qualities considered desirable by the society, such as strength, fierceness, or lovemaking ability. The Abipone Indians of Paraguay eat jaguars and bulls to make them strong, brave, and swift. The mandrake, a plant native to Mediterranean climates, was thought to enhance an individual’s lovemaking abilities. The smell of the plant’s orange-colored berries is attractive, but the mandrake’s association with sexual prowess comes primarily from the appearance of the root, which is thick, fleshy, and forked, suggesting a man’s torso. In parts of Africa and the Middle East, the mandrake’s root is administered as a drug, and several references to its powers are found in the Bible.

People refuse to eat particular plants or animals that are thought to embody negative forces in the environment. Such a restriction on behavior imposed by social custom is a taboo.

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**Figure 4–5 Istanbul bostan. Geographer Paul Kaldjian sketched a typical bostan, a traditional vegetable garden in the center of Istanbul, Turkey. Although declining in importance, bostans still provide residents of the large city of Istanbul with a source of fresh vegetables.**
Other social customs, such as sexual practices, carry prohibitions, but taboos are especially strong in the area of food.

The Ainu in Japan avoid eating otters because they are believed to be forgetful animals and consuming them could cause loss of memory. Europeans blamed the potato, the first edible plant they had encountered that grew from tubers rather than seeds, for a variety of problems during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including typhoid, tuberculosis, and famine. Initially, Europeans also resisted eating the potato because it resembled human deformities caused by leprosy.

Before becoming pregnant, the Mbum Kpau women of Chad do not eat chicken or goat. Abstaining from consumption of these animals is thought to help escape pain in childbirth and to prevent birth of a child with abnormalities. During pregnancy, Mbum Kpau women avoid meat from antelopes with twisted horns, which could cause them to bear offspring with deformities. In the Trobriand Islands off the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea, couples are prohibited from eating meals together before marriage, whereas premarital sexual relations are an accepted feature of social life.

Some folk cultures may establish food taboos because of concern for the natural environment. These taboos may help to protect endangered animals or to conserve scarce natural resources. For example, to preserve scarce species, only a few high-ranking people in some tropical regions are permitted to hunt, whereas the majority cultivate crops. However, most food-avoidance customs arise from cultural values.

Relatively well-known taboos against consumption of certain foods can be found in the Bible. The ancient Hebrews were prohibited from eating a wide variety of foods, including animals that do not chew their cud or that have cloven feet, and fish lacking fins or scales. These taboos arose partially from concern for the environment by the Hebrews, who lived as pastoral nomads in lands bordering the eastern Mediterranean. The pig, for example, is prohibited in part because it is more suited to sedentary farming than pastoral nomadism, and in part because its meat spoils relatively quickly in hot climates, such as the Mediterranean. These biblical taboos were developed through oral tradition and by rabbis into the Kosher Laws observed today by some Jews.

Similarly, Muslims embrace the taboo against pork, because pigs are unsuited for the dry lands of the Arabian Peninsula (Figure 4–6). Pigs would compete with humans for food and water without offering compensating benefits, such as being able to pull a plow, carry loads, or provide milk and wool. Widespread raising of pigs would be an ecological disaster in Islam's hearth.

Hindu taboos against consuming cows can also be partly explained by environmental reasons. Cows are the source of oxen (castrated male bovine), the traditional choice for pulling plows as well as carts. A large supply of oxen must be maintained in India, because every field has to be plowed at approximately the same time—when the monsoon rains arrive. Religious sanctions have kept India's cow population large as a form of insurance against the loss of oxen and increasing population.

But the taboo against consumption of meat among many people, including Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, cannot be explained primarily by environmental factors. Social values must influence the choice of diet, because people in similar climates and with similar levels of income consume different foods. The biblical food taboos were established in part to set the Hebrew people apart from others. That Christians

![Figure 4–6 Annual hog production. The number of hogs produced in different parts of the world is influenced to a considerable extent by religious taboos against consuming pork. Hog production is virtually nonexistent in predominantly Muslim regions, such as northern Africa and southwestern Asia, whereas the level is high in predominantly Buddhist China and predominantly Christian countries.](image-url)
ignore the biblical food injunctions reflects their desire to distinguish themselves from Jews. Furthermore, as a universalizing religion, Christianity was less tied to taboos that originated in the Middle East (see Chapter 6).

Food taboos are significant even in countries dominated by popular culture, such as the United States. Americans avoid eating insects, despite their nutritional value. In Thailand and Myanmar (Burma), on the other hand, giant water bugs are deep fried as a snack food or ground up in sauces. Mixing insects with rice provides lysine, an amino acid that is often deficient in the diet of people in less developed countries (LDCs), where rice is the staple food. The aversion of most Americans to eating insects is contradicted by consumption of such foods as canned mushrooms and tomato paste, which contain insects although not commonly acknowledged.

**Folk Housing**

French geographer Jean Brunhes, a major contributor to the cultural landscape tradition, views the house as being among the essential facts of human geography. It is a product of both cultural tradition and natural conditions. American cultural geographer Fred Kniffen considered the house to be a good reflection of cultural heritage, current fashion, functional needs, and the impact of environment.

**DISTINCTIVE BUILDING MATERIALS.** The type of building materials used to construct folk houses is influenced partly by the resources available in the environment. The two most common building materials in the world are wood and brick, although stone, grass, sod, and skins are also used. If available, wood is generally preferred for house construction because it is easy to build with it. In the past, pioneers who settled in forested regions built log cabins for themselves.

Today, people in MDCs buy lumber that has been cut by machine into the needed shapes. Cut lumber is used to erect a frame, and sheets or strips of wood are attached for the floors, ceilings, and roof. Shingles, stucco, vinyl, aluminum, or other materials may be placed on the exterior for insulation or decoration.

Some societies have limited access to forests and use alternative materials. In relatively hot, dry climates—such as the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, northern China, and parts of the Middle East—bricks are made by baking wet mud in the sun. Stone is used to build houses in parts of Europe and South America and as decoration on the outside of brick or wood houses in other countries.

The choice of building materials is influenced both by social factors and by what is available from the environment. If the desired material is not locally available, then it must be imported. For example, migrants sometimes paved streets and built houses in their new location with the stone ballast placed in the hold of the ship that transported them. Building materials may be available but may be more expensive than alternatives. To save money (as well as trees), most new homes in the United States have interior walls made of drywall (filled with gypsum, a widely available mineral) rather than wood.

**DISTINCTIVE HOUSE FORM AND ORIENTATION.** Social groups may share building materials, but the distinctive form of their houses may result from customary beliefs or environmental factors. In addition, the orientation of the houses on their plots of land can vary.

The form of houses in some societies might reflect religious values. For example, houses may have sacred walls or corners. The east wall of a house is considered sacred in Fiji, as is the northwest wall in parts of China. Sacred walls or corners are also noted in parts of the Middle East, India, and Africa.

In Madagascar, religious considerations influence the use of each part of the house and even furniture arrangement. The main door is on the west, considered the most important direction, whereas the northeast corner is the most sacred. The north wall is for honoring ancestors; in addition, important guests enter a room from the north and are seated against the north wall. The bed is placed against the east wall of the house, with the head facing north.

Beliefs govern the arrangement of household activities in a variety of Southeast Asian societies. In the south-central part of the island of Java, the front door always faces south, the direction of the South Sea Goddess, who holds the key to Earth.

Figure 4-7 (left) shows a housing custom of the Lao people in northern Laos, who arrange beds perpendicular to the center ridgepole of the house. Because the head is considered high and noble and the feet low and vulgar, people sleep so that their heads will be opposite their neighbor's heads and their feet opposite their neighbor's feet. The principal exception to this arrangement: a child who builds a house next door to the parents sleeps with his or her head toward the parents' feet as a sign of obeying the customary hierarchy.

Although they speak similar Southeast Asian languages and adhere to Buddhism, the Lao do not orient their houses in the same manner as the Yuan and Shan peoples in nearby northern Thailand (Figure 4-7, right). The Yuan and Shan ignore the position of neighbors and all sleep with their heads toward the east, which Buddhists consider the most auspicious direction. Staircases must not face west, the least auspicious direction, the direction of death and evil spirits.

**HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT.** The form of housing is related to environmental as well as social conditions. The construction of a pitched roof is important in wet or snowy climates to facilitate runoff and to reduce the weight of accumulated snow. Windows may face south in temperate climates to take advantage of the Sun's heat and light. In hot climates, on the other hand, window openings may be smaller to protect the interior from the full heat of the Sun.

Even in areas that share similar climates and available building materials, folk housing can vary because of minor differences in environmental features. For example, R. W. McColl compared house types in four villages situated in the dry lands of northern and western China. All use similar building materials, including adobe and timber from the desert poplar tree, and they share a similar objective—protection from extreme temperatures, from very hot summer days to subfreezing winter nights.
Despite their similarities, the houses in these four Chinese villages have individual designs. Houses have second-floor open-air patios in Kashgar, small open courtyards in Turpan, large private courtyards in Yinchuan, and sloped roofs in Dunhuang. McColl attributed the differences to local cultural preferences (Figure 4-8).

**U.S. Folk House Forms**

Older houses in the United States display local folk-culture traditions. When families migrated westward in the 1700s and 1800s, they cut trees to clear fields for planting and used the wood to build houses, barns, and fences. The style of pioneer homes reflected whatever upscale style was prevailing at the place on the East Coast from which they migrated. In contrast, houses built in the United States during the past half-century display popular culture influences.

Fred Kniffen identified three major hearths or nodes of folk house forms in the United States: New England, Middle Atlantic, and Lower Chesapeake. Migrants carried house types from New England northward to upper New England and westward across the southern Great Lakes region; from the Middle Atlantic westward across the Ohio Valley and southwestward along the Appalachian trails; and from the lower Chesapeake southwest along the Atlantic Coast (Figure 4-9).

Four major house types were popular in New England at various times during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as shown in Figure 4-10. When settlers from New England migrated westward, they took their house type with them. The New England house type can be found throughout the Great Lakes region as far west as Wisconsin, because this area was settled primarily by migrants from New England. As the house preferred by New Englanders changed over time, the predominant form found on the landscape varies based on the date of initial settlement.

The major house type in the Middle Atlantic region was known as the "I"-house, typically two full stories in height, with gables to the sides. The "I"-house resembled the letter "I"—it was only one room deep and at least two rooms wide. The "I"-house became the most extensive style of construction in much of the eastern half of the United States, especially in the Ohio Valley and Appalachia. Settlers built "I"-houses in much of the Midwest because most of them had migrated from the Middle Atlantic region.

The Lower Chesapeake or Tidewater style of house typically comprised one story, with a steep roof and chimneys at either end. These houses spread from the Chesapeake Bay—Tidewater, Virginia, area along the southeast coast. As was the case with the Middle Atlantic "I"-house, the form of housing that evolved along the southeast coast typically was only one room deep. In wet areas, houses in the coastal southeast were often raised on piers or a on a brick foundation.

Today, such distinctions are relatively difficult to observe in the United States. The style of housing does not display the same degree of regional distinctiveness because rapid communication and transportation systems provide people throughout the country with knowledge of alternative styles. Furthermore, most people do not build the houses in which they live. Instead, houses are usually mass produced by construction companies.

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**Figure 4-7** (left) Houses of Lao people in northern Laos. The fronts of Lao houses, such as those in the village of Muang Nan, Laos, face one another across a path, and the backs face each other at the rear. Their ridgepoles (the centerline of the roof) are set perpendicular to the path but parallel to a stream if one is nearby. Inside adjacent houses, people sleep in the orientation shown, so neighbors are head-to-head or feet-to-feet. (right) Houses of Yuan and Shan peoples in northern Thailand. In the village of Ban Mae Sakud, Thailand, the houses are not set in a straight line because of a belief that evil spirits move in straight lines. Ridgepoles parallel the path, and the heads of all sleeping persons point eastward.
FIGURE 4-8 House types in four communities of western China. (upper left) Kashgar houses have second-floor open-air patios, where the residents can catch evening breezes. Poplar and fruit trees can be planted around the houses, because the village has a river that is constantly flowing rather than seasonal, as is the case in much of China's dry lands. These deciduous trees provide shade in the summer and openings for sunlight in the winter. (lower left) Turpan houses have small, open courtyards for social gatherings. Turpan is situated in a deep valley with relatively little open land, because much of the space is allocated to drying raisins. Second-story patios, which would use even less land, are avoided, because the village is subject to strong winds. (lower right) Yinchuan houses are built around large, open-air courtyards, which contain tall trees to provide shade. Most residents are Muslims, who regard courtyards as private spaces to be screened from outsiders. The adobe bricks are square or cubic rather than rectangular, as is the case in the other villages, though R. W. McColl found no reason for this distinctive custom. (upper right) Dunhuang houses are characterized by walled central courtyards, covered by an open-lattice grape arbor. The cover allows for the free movement of air but provides shade from the especially intense direct summer heat and light. Rather than the flat roofs characteristic of dry lands, houses in Dunhuang have sloped roofs, typical of wetter climates, so that rainfall can run off. The practice is apparently influenced by Dunhuang's relative proximity to the population centers of eastern China, where sloped roofs predominate.