**KEY ISSUE 3**

**Why Is Popular Culture Widely Distributed?**

- Diffusion of popular housing, clothing, and food
- Role of television in diffusing popular culture

Popular culture varies more in time than in place. Like folk culture, it may originate in one location, within the context of a particular society and environment. But, in contrast to folk culture, it diffuses rapidly across Earth to locations with a variety of physical conditions. Rapid diffusion depends on a group of people having a sufficiently high level of economic development to acquire the material possessions associated with popular culture.

---

**Diffusion of Popular Housing, Clothing, and Food**

Some regional differences in food, clothing, and shelter persist in MDCs, but differences are much less than in the past. Go to any recently built neighborhood on the outskirts of an American city from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon: the houses look the same, the people wear jeans, and the same chains deliver pizza.

**Popular Housing Styles**

Housing built in the United States since the 1940s demonstrates how popular customs vary more in time than in place. In contrast with folk housing characteristic of the early 1800s, newer housing in the United States has been built to reflect rapidly changing fashion concerning the most suitable house form.

Houses show the influence of shapes, materials, detailing, and other features of architectural style in vogue at any one
point in time. In the years immediately after World War II, which ended in 1945, most U.S. houses were built in a modern style. Since the 1960s, styles that architects call neo-eclectic have predominated (Figure 4-11).

MODERN HOUSE STYLES (1945–60). Specific types of modern-style houses were popular at different times. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the dominant type was known as minimal traditional, reminiscent of Tudor-style houses popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Minimal traditional houses were usually one story, with a dominant front gable and few decorative details. They were small, modest houses designed to house young families and veterans returning from World War II.

The ranch house replaced minimal traditional as the dominant style of housing in the 1950s and into the 1960s. The ranch house was one story, with the long side parallel to the street. With all the rooms on one level rather than two or three, the ranch house took up a larger lot and encouraged the sprawl of urban areas (see Chapter 13).

The split-level house was a popular variant of the ranch house between the 1950s and 1970s. The lower level of the typical split-level house contained the garage and the newly invented "family" room, where the television set was placed. The kitchen and formal living and dining rooms were placed on the intermediate level, with the bedrooms on the top level above the family room and garage.

The contemporary style was an especially popular choice between the 1950s and 1970s for architect-designed houses. These houses frequently had flat or low-pitched roofs. The shed style, popular in the late 1960s, was characterized by high-pitched shed roofs, giving the house the appearance of a series of geometric forms.

NEO-ECLECTIC HOUSE STYLES (SINCE 1960). In the late 1960s, neo-eclectic styles became popular and by the 1970s had surpassed modern styles in vogue. The first popular neo-eclectic style was the mansard in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The shingle-covered second-story walls sloped slightly inward and merged into the roofline.

The neo-Tudor style, popular in the 1970s, was characterized by dominant, steep-pitched front-facing gables and half-timbered detailing. The neo-French style also appeared in the early 1970s and by the early 1980s was the most fashionable style for new
houses. It featured dormer windows, usually with rounded tops, and high-hipped roofs. The neo-colonial style, an adaptation of English colonial houses, has been continuously popular since the 1950s but never dominant. Inside many neo-eclectic houses, a large central "great room" has replaced separate family and living rooms, which were located in different wings or floors of ranch and split-level houses.

**Rapid Diffusion of Clothing Styles**

Individual clothing habits reveal how popular culture can be distributed across the landscape with little regard for distinctive physical features. Such habits reflect availability of income, as well as social forms such as job characteristics.

In the MDCs of North America and Western Europe, clothing habits generally reflect occupations rather than particular environments. A lawyer or business executive, for example, tends to wear a dark suit, light shirt or blouse, and necktie or scarf, whereas a factory worker wears jeans and a work shirt. A lawyer in California is more likely to dress like a lawyer in New York than like a steelworker in California.

A second influence on clothing in MDCs is higher income. Women's clothes, in particular, change in fashion from one year to the next. The color, shape, and design of dresses change to imitate pieces created by clothing designers. For social purposes, people with sufficient income may update their wardrobe frequently with the latest fashions.

Improved communications have permitted the rapid diffusion of clothing styles from one region of Earth to another. Original designs for women's dresses, created in Paris, Milan, London, or New York, are reproduced in large quantities at factories in Asia and sold for relatively low prices in North American and European chain stores. Speed is essential in manufacturing copies of designer dresses because fashion tastes change quickly.

Until recently, a year could elapse from the time an original dress was displayed to the time that inexpensive reproductions were available in the stores. Now the time lag is less than 6 weeks because of the diffusion of fax machines, computers, and satellites. Sketches, patterns, and specifications are sent instantly from European fashion centers to American corporate headquarters and then on to Asian factories. Buyers from the major retail chains can view the fashions on large, high-definition televisions linked by satellite networks.

The globalization of clothing styles has involved increasing awareness by North Americans and Europeans of the variety of folk costumes around the world. Increased travel and the diffusion of television have exposed people in MDCs to other forms of dress, just as people in other parts of the world have come into contact with Western dress. The poncho from South America, the dashiki of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, and the Aleut parka have been adopted by people elsewhere in the world. The continued use of folk costumes in some parts of the globe may persist not because of distinctive environmental conditions or traditional cultural values but to preserve past memories or to attract tourists.

**JEANS.** An important symbol of the diffusion of Western popular culture is jeans, which became a prized possession for young people throughout the world. In the late 1960s jeans acquired an image of youthful independence in the United States as young people adopted a style of clothing previously associated with low-status manual laborers and farmers.
Locally made denim trousers are available throughout Europe and Asia for under $10, but "genuine" jeans made by Levi Strauss, priced at $50 to $100, are preferred as a status symbol. Millions of second-hand Levis are sold each year in Asia, especially in Japan and Thailand, with most priced between $100 and $1,000. Even in the face of the globalization of popular culture such as wearing jeans, some local variation persists: according to sellers of used jeans, Asians especially prefer Levi's 501 model with a button fly rather than a zipper. And within the United States the button fly is more common on the West Coast, whereas easterners prefer the zipper fly because it doesn't let in cold air.

Jeans became an obsession and a status symbol among youth in the former Soviet Union when the Communist government prevented their import. Gangs would attack people to steal their American-made jeans, and authentic jeans would sell for $400 on the black market. Ironically, jeans were brought into the Soviet Union by the elite, including diplomats, bureaucrats, and business executives—essentially those who were permitted to travel to the West. These citizens obtained scarce products in the West and resold them inside the Soviet Union for a considerable profit.

The scarcity of high-quality jeans was just one of many consumer problems that were important motives in the dismantling of Communist governments in Eastern Europe around 1990. Eastern Europeans, who were aware of Western fashions and products—thanks to television—could not obtain them, because government-controlled industries were inefficient and geared to producing tanks rather than consumer-oriented goods (see Chapter 11).

With the end of communism, jeans can now be imported freely into Russia. Levi Strauss opened a store in the center of Moscow that sells jeans for about $50, about a week's wage for a typical Russian. In an integrated global economy, prominent symbols of popular culture have diffused around the world. Access to these products is now limited primarily by lack of money rather than government regulation.

Ironically, as access to Levi's increased around the world, American consumers turned away from the brand. Sales plummeted from $7 billion in 1996 to $4 billion in 2004, the year Levi's closed its last U.S. factory. To reclaim lost consumers in the United States, Levi's has tried to market jeans equipped with an iPod remote control and docking station fitted in the pocket.

Popular Food Customs

Popular culture flourishes where people in a society have sufficient income to acquire the tangible elements of popular culture and the leisure time to make use of them. People in a country with a more developed economy are likely to have the income, time, and inclination to facilitate greater adoption of popular culture.

ALCOHOL AND FRESH PRODUCE. Consumption of large quantities of alcoholic beverages and snack foods are characteristic of the food customs of popular societies. Nonetheless, the amounts of alcohol and snacks consumed, as well as preferences for particular types, vary by region within MDCs, such as the United States.

Americans choose particular beverages or snacks in part on the basis of preference for what is produced, grown, or imported locally. Bourbon consumption in the United States is concentrated in the Upper South, where most of it is produced. Rum consumption is heavily concentrated on the East Coast, where it arrives from the Caribbean, whereas Canadian whiskey is preferred in communities contiguous to Canada (Figure 4–12). Southerners may prefer pork rinds because more hogs are raised there, and northerners may prefer popcorn and potato chips because more corn and potatoes are grown there.

However, cultural backgrounds also affect the amount and types of alcohol and snack foods consumed. Alcohol consumption relates partially to religious backgrounds and partially to income and advertising. Baptists and Mormons, for example, drink less than do adherents of other denominations. Because Baptists are concentrated in the Southeast and Mormons in Utah, these regions have relatively low consumption rates. Nevada has a high rate because of the heavy concentration of gambling and other resort activities there. Texans may prefer tortilla chips because of the large number of Hispanic Americans there, and westerners may prefer multigrain chips because of greater concern for the nutritional content of snack foods.

Geographers cannot explain all the regional variations in food preferences. Why do urban residents prefer Scotch, and New Englanders consume nuts? Why is per capita consumption of snack food one-third higher in the Midwest than in the West? Why does consumption of gin and vodka show little spatial variation within the United States?

In general, though, consumption of alcohol and snack foods is part of popular culture primarily dependent on two factors—high income and national advertising. Variations within the United States are much less significant than differences between the United States and LDCs in Africa and Asia.

WINE PRODUCTION. The spatial distribution of wine production demonstrates that the environment plays a role in the distribution of popular as well as folk food customs. The distinctive character of a wine derives from a unique combination of soil, climate, and other physical characteristics at the place where the grapes are grown.

Vineyards are best cultivated in temperate climates of moderately cold, rainy winters and fairly long, hot summers. Hot, sunny weather is necessary in the summer for the fruit to mature properly, whereas winter is the preferred season for rain, because plant diseases that cause the fruit to rot are more active in hot, humid weather. Vineyards are planted on hillside, if possible, to maximize exposure to sunlight and to facilitate drainage. A site near a lake or river is also desirable because water can temper extremes of temperature.

Grapes can be grown in a variety of soils, but the best wine tends to be produced from grapes grown in soil that is coarse and well drained—a soil not necessarily fertile for other crops. For example, the soil is generally sandy and gravelly in the Bordeaux wine region, chalky in Champagne country, and slate composition in the Moselle Valley. The distinctive character of each region's wine is especially influenced by the unique combination of trace elements, such as boron, manganese, and zinc, in the rock or soil. In large quantities these
CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIC TOOLS
Documenting House Types Through Fieldwork

Fieldwork has been regarded as an important geographic method since the development of geography as a modern science two centuries ago. Geographers head for destinations near and far—to bustling urban areas and to remote rural areas, within their own countries or abroad. Given their concern with regularities in space, geographers need to get out of their classrooms and laboratories to observe the visible elements of other places with their own eyes. Fieldwork has been especially important for understanding the unique character of a place or the collection of features that distinguish one region from another.

Geographers make use of fieldwork in two principal ways. First, collecting information in the field can be the basis for drawing conclusions about expected patterns. Second, observing conditions in the field can be a source of inspiration for thinking about problems to address in future scientific studies. In other words, fieldwork helps some geographers to answer questions and helps others to ask questions.

Especially well suited to field studies have been visible everyday elements of folk and popular culture, such as house styles. Statistical studies and questionnaires such as the census can help geographers determine the size and date of construction of a house, but not the style that inspired its design. Only by looking at a house can its style of design be classified. Field material can be collected by delineating one or more areas on a map and visiting the sites. Armed with a chart or a spreadsheet, the geographer counts the number of times that something appears in the area, such as a particular type of house.

According to fieldwork by geographers John Jakle, Robert Bastian, and Douglas Meyer, regional differences in the predominant type of house persist to some extent in the United States. Small towns in the southeastern United States were more likely to contain ranch houses. In northeastern small towns the most numerous style was the so-called double pile, which was two rooms wide and two rooms deep (Figure 4–1.1). Northeastern houses were larger, more likely to be painted white, and have garages, whereas southeastern houses were smaller, more likely to be painted beige or brown, and have carports. Differences in roofs, porches, and building materials also distinguish northeastern and southeastern houses.

Differences in housing among U.S. communities derive largely from differences in the time period in which the houses were built. The ranch house was more common in the Southeast than in the Northeast primarily because the Southeast grew much more rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s, the period when the ranch house was especially popular. A housing development built in one region will resemble closely developments built at the same time elsewhere in the country than will developments built in the same region at other points in time.

![Figure 4–1.1](image)

**Figure 4–1.1** Regional differences in house types. Jakle, Bastian, and Meyer allocated the single-family housing in 20 small towns in the eastern United States into five groups: bungalow, double pile, irregularly massed, ranch, and single pile. Ranch houses were more common in the southeastern towns, whereas double-pile houses predominated in northeastern areas.

Elements could destroy the plants, but in small quantities they lend a unique taste to the grapes.

Because of the unique product created by the distinctive soil and climate characteristics, the world's finest wines are most frequently identified by their place of origin. Wines may be labeled with the region, town, district, or specific estate. A wine expert can determine the precise origin of a wine just by tasting because of the unique taste imparted to the grapes by the specific soil composition of each estate. (Similarly, a coffee expert can tell precisely where the beans were grown.)
The year of the harvest is also indicated on finer wines because specific weather conditions each year affect the quality and quantity of the harvest. Wines may also be identified by the variety of grape used rather than the location of the vineyard. Less expensive wines might contain a blend of grapes from a variety of estates and years.

Although grapes can be grown in a wide variety of locations, wine distribution is based principally on cultural values, both historical and contemporary. Wine is made today primarily in locations that have a tradition of excellence in making it and people who like to drink it and can afford to purchase it.

The social custom of wine production in much of France and Italy extends back at least to the Roman Empire. Wine consumption declined after the Fall of Rome, and many vineyards were destroyed. Monasteries preserved the wine-making tradition in medieval Europe for both sustenance and ritual. Wine consumption has become extremely popular again in Europe in recent centuries, as well as in the Western Hemisphere, which was colonized by Europeans. Vineyards are now typically owned by private individuals and corporations rather than religious organizations.

Wine production is discouraged in regions of the world dominated by religions other than Christianity (Figure 4-13). Hindus and Muslims in particular avoid alcoholic beverages. Thus wine production is limited in the Middle East (other than Israel) and southern Asia primarily because of cultural values, especially religion. The distribution of wine production shows that the diffusion of popular customs depends less on the distinctive environment of a location than on the presence of beliefs, institutions, and material traits conducive to accepting those customs.

**Role of Television in Diffusing Popular Culture**

Watching television is an especially significant popular custom for two reasons. First, it is the most popular leisure activity in MDCs throughout the world. Second, television is the most important mechanism by which knowledge of popular culture, such as professional sports, is rapidly diffused across Earth.

**Diffusion of Television**

Television technology was developed simultaneously in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union, as well as the United States, but in the early years of broadcasting the United States held a near monopoly. Through the second half of the twentieth century, television diffused from the United States, first to Europe and other MDCs, then to LDCs.

The U.S. public first saw television in the 1930s, but its diffusion was blocked for a number of years when broadcasting was curtailed or suspended entirely during World War II. With the end of World War II, the number of television sets increased rapidly in the United States, from 10,000 in 1945 to 1 million in 1949, 10 million in 1951, and 50 million in 1959.

In 1954, for example, the first year that the United Nations published data on the subject, the United States had 86 percent of the world’s 37 million TV sets, the United Kingdom 9 percent, the Soviet Union and Canada 2 percent each, and a handful of other countries (primarily Cuba, Mexico, France, and Brazil) the remainder. The United States had approximately 200 TV sets per 1,000 inhabitants in 1954, and the rest of the world had approximately 2 per 1,000 (Figure 4-14, top).

In 1970, the United States still had far more TV sets per capita than any other country except Canada (Figure 4-14, middle). However, rapid growth of ownership in Europe meant that the share of the world’s sets in the United States had declined to one-fourth. Still, in 1970, half of the countries in the world, including most of those in Africa and Asia, had little if any TV broadcasting.

By the end of the twentieth century, international differences in TV ownership had diminished, although had not disappeared.
altogether (Figure 4-14, bottom). The United States still had a much higher level of television ownership than the world as a whole, but so did Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Meanwhile, ownership rates climbed sharply between 1970 and 2000 in LDCs, such as in China from less than 1 per 1,000 to 304 per 1,000 and in Indonesia from less than 1 per 1,000 to 154 per 1,000.

Diffusion of the Internet

The diffusion of Internet service follows the pattern established by television a generation earlier, but at a more rapid pace. There were 40 million Internet users worldwide in 1995, including 25 million in the United States, and Internet service had not yet reached most countries (Figure 4-15, top).

Between 1995 and 2000, Internet usage increased rapidly in the United States, from 9 percent to 44 percent of the population. But the increase was much greater in the rest of the world, from 40 million Internet users in 1995 to 400 million in 2000. As Internet usage diffused rapidly, the U.S. share declined rapidly, from 62 percent of the world total in 1995 to 31 percent in 2000 (Figure 4-15, middle).

In the first years of the twenty-first century, Internet usage further diffused rapidly. World usage more than doubled in 4 years, from 400 million in 2000 to 880 million in 2004. U.S. usage continued to increase, but at a more modest rate, to 63 percent of the population. As a result, the share of the world's Internet users found in the United States continued to decline, to 21 percent in 2004 (Figure 4-15, bottom).

Given the history of television, the Internet is likely to diffuse rapidly to other countries in the years ahead. Other than the United States, relatively high rates of Internet hosts were in MDCs (Japan, Canada, and Western Europe) and only a tenth were in LDCs. Among less developed regions, Latin America and Asia are likely to expand Internet hosts more rapidly than Africa.

Note that all six maps in Figures 4-14 and 4-15 use the same classifications and colors. For example, the highest class in all maps is 300 or more per 1,000. What is different is the time interval. The diffusion of television from the United States to the rest of the world took a half-century, whereas the diffusion of the Internet has taken only a decade.

Government Control of Television

In the United States most television stations are owned by private corporations, which receive licenses from the government to operate at specific frequencies (channels). The company makes a profit by selling air time for advertisements. Some stations, however, are owned by local governments or other nonprofit organizations and are devoted to educational or noncommercial programs.

The U.S. pattern of private commercial stations is found in other Western Hemisphere countries but is rare elsewhere in the world. In nearly all developed countries other than the United States, broadcasting is provided entirely or in part by a public corporation or by a public-private partnership. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) receives government grants, whereas the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Japan's Nippon Hosō Kyokai (NHK) are funded through license fees paid by owners of TV sets. Independence from government interference is guaranteed in their charters. Commercial channels co-exist with public channels in many of these countries.
FIGURE 4-14 Televisions per 1,000 inhabitants in 1954, 1970, and 2003. Television has diffused from North America and Europe to other regions of the world. The United States and Canada had far more TV sets per capita than any other country as recently as the 1970s, but several European countries now have higher rates of ownership.
FIGURE 4-15 Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants in 1995, 2000, and 2004. Compare to the diffusion of television (Figure 4-14). Internet service in the twenty-first century is following a similar pattern to the diffusion of television in the twentieth century, with the United States having a much higher rate of usage at first and other countries catching up. However, Internet service is diffusing much more rapidly than television did.
Direct management of TV through a government agency is typical of LDCs, including China and India, as well as many other countries in Africa and Asia. Government operation was also typical in Communist countries in Eastern Europe. Governments control TV stations to minimize the likelihood that programs hostile to current policies will be broadcast—in other words, they are censored.

**REDUCED GOVERNMENT CONTROL.** In the past, many governments viewed television as an important tool for fostering cultural integration; television could extol the exploits of the leaders or the accomplishments of the political system. People turned on their TV sets and watched what the government wanted them to see. Because television signals weaken with distance and are strong up to roughly 100 kilometers (60 miles), few people could receive television broadcasts from other countries. George Orwell's novel *1984*, published in 1949, anticipated that television—then in its infancy—would play a major role in the ability of a totalitarian government to control people’s daily lives.

In recent years, changing technology—especially the diffusion of small satellite dishes—has made television a force for political change rather than stability. Satellite dishes enable people to choose from a wide variety of programs produced in other countries, not just the local government-controlled station.

A number of governments in Asia have tried to prevent consumers from obtaining satellite dishes. The Chinese government banned private ownership of satellite dishes by its citizens, although foreigners and upscale hotels were allowed to keep them. The government of Singapore banned ownership of satellite dishes, yet it encourages satellite services, including MTV and HBO, to locate their Asian headquarters in the country. The government of Saudi Arabia ordered 150,000 satellite dishes dismantled, claiming that they were “un-Islamic.”

Governments have had little success in shutting down satellite technology. Despite the threat of heavy fines, several hundred thousand Chinese still own satellite dishes. Consumers can outwit the government because the small size of satellite dishes makes them easy to smuggle into the country and erect out of sight, perhaps behind a brick wall or under a canvas tarpaulin. A dish may be expensive by local standards—twice the annual salary of a typical Chinese, for example—but several neighbors can share the cost and hook up all of their TV sets to it.

The diffusion of small satellite dishes hastened the collapse of Communist governments in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s. For the first time, Eastern Europeans living beyond the signal range of Western broadcast stations could watch TV programs from Western Europe and North America. Eastern European countries have allocated some of their channels to such foreign broadcasters as CNN and MTV, because after many years under Communist control, citizens still do not trust the accuracy of locally produced television programs.

Satellite dishes represent only one assault on government control of the flow of information. Fax machines, portable video recorders, and cellular telephones have also put chinks in government censorship. TV broadcasting has also migrated to new media, such as computers, cellular telephones, and other handheld devices. Programs can be viewed on demand, sometimes at a fee.

**KEY ISSUE 4**

**Why Does Globalization of Popular Culture Cause Problems?**

- Threat to folk culture
- Environmental impact of popular culture

The international diffusion of popular culture has led to two problems, both of which can be understood from geographic perspectives. First, the diffusion of popular culture may threaten the survival of traditional folk culture in many countries. Second, popular culture may be less responsive to the diversity of local environments and consequently may generate adverse environmental impacts.

**Threat to Folk Culture**

Many fear the loss of folk culture, especially because rising incomes can fuel demand for the possessions typical of popular culture. When people turn from folk to popular culture, they may also turn away from the society's traditional values. And the diffusion of popular culture from MDCs can lead to dominance of Western perspectives.
Loss of Traditional Values
One example of the symbolic importance of folk culture is clothing. In African and Asian countries today, there is a contrast between the clothes of rural farmworkers and of urban business and government leaders. Adoption of a more developed society's types of clothing is part of a process of imitation and replication of foreign symbols of success. Leaders of African and Asian countries have traveled to MDCs and experienced the sense of social status attached to clothes, such as men's business suits. Adoption of clothing customs from MDCs has become a symbol of authority and leadership at home. The Western business suit has been accepted as the uniform for business executives and bureaucrats around the world.

Wearing clothes typical of MDCs is controversial in some Middle Eastern countries. Some political leaders in the region choose to wear Western business suits as a sign that they are trying to forge closer links with the United States and Western European countries. Fundamentalist Muslims oppose the widespread adoption of Western clothes, especially by women living in cities, as well as other social customs and attitudes typical of MDCs. Women are urged to abandon skirts and blouses in favor of the traditional black chador, a combination head covering and veil.

In its 1997 presidential election, Iran was presented with a sharp contrast between Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, who favored banning Western popular culture not in accordance with strict Muslim practices, and a more moderate candidate, Mohammad Khatami, who favored more tolerance of Western cultural influences. Religious and military leaders supported Nateq-Nouri, but young people overwhelmingly supported Khatami. A 21-year-old woman said, "I want Khatami to win because I want to continue wearing my blue jeans." Khatami won.

CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL ROLE OF WOMEN. The global diffusion of popular culture threatens the subservience of women to men that is embedded in many folk customs. Women were traditionally relegated to performing household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, and to bearing and raising large numbers of children. Those women who worked outside the home were likely to be obtaining food for the family, either through agricultural work or by trading handicrafts.

Under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan during the late 1990s, women were treated especially harshly. Women were prohibited from attending school, working outside the home, seeking health care, or driving a car. They were permitted to leave home only if fully covered by clothing and escorted by a male relative. A woman behaving like a "Westerner" in public, such as wearing fingernail polish, revealing her face, or walking alone, could be beaten or shot.

Advancement of women was limited by low levels of education and high rates of victimization from violence, often inflicted by husbands. The concepts of legal equality and availability of economic and social opportunities outside the home have become widely accepted in MDCs, even where women in reality continue to suffer from discriminatory practices.

However, contact with popular culture also has brought negative impacts for women in LDCs, such as an increase in prostitution. Hundreds of thousands of men from MDCs, such as Japan and Northern Europe (especially Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands), purchase tours from travel agencies that include airfare, hotels, and the use of a predetermined number of women. The principal destinations of these "sex tours" include the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, and to a lesser extent Indonesia and Sri Lanka. International prostitution is encouraged in these countries as a major source of foreign currency. Through this form of global interaction, popular culture may regard women as essentially equal at home but as objects that money can buy in foreign folk societies. (See Global Forces, Local Impacts box.)

Threat of Foreign Media Imperialism
Less developed countries fear the incursion of popular culture for other reasons. Leaders of some LDCs consider the dominance of popular customs by MDCs as a threat to their independence. The threat is posed primarily by the media, especially news-gathering organizations and television.

Three MDCs—the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan—dominate the television industry in LDCs. The Japanese operate primarily in South Asia and East Asia, selling their electronic equipment. British companies have invested directly in management and programming for television in Africa. U.S. corporations own or provide technical advice to many Latin American...
GLOBAL FORCE, LOCAL IMPACTS
India’s Marriage Dowries

Global diffusion of popular social customs has had an unintended negative impact for women in India: an increase in demand for dowries. A dowry is a “gift” from the family of a bride to the family of a groom, as a sign of respect. Though illegal in India since 1961, the dowry has regained popularity in recent years.

Traditionally, the local custom in much of India was for the groom to provide a small dowry to the bride’s family. Now, the custom has reversed, and the family of a bride is often expected to provide a substantial dowry to the husband’s family.

Dowries have become much larger in modern India, an important source of income for the groom’s family. A dowry can take the form of either cash or expensive consumer goods, such as motor vehicles, electronics, and household appliances.

The government has tried to ban dowries because of the adverse impact on women. If the bride’s family is unable to pay a promised dowry or installments, the groom’s family may cast the bride out on the street, and her family may refuse to take her back. Husbands and in-laws angry over the small size of dowry payments have killed 5,000 to 7,000 women during the 1990s and early twenty-first century, according to government statistics.

Because a boy will generate revenue, whereas a girl will impose a significant burden, a fetus is more likely to be aborted if it is found to be a girl. A study of a Mumbai (Bombay) clinic found that 7,999 of 8,000 aborted fetuses were female. In families where food is scarce, girls age 1 to 5 are 43 percent more likely than boys to die of hunger or malnutrition, according to another study.

In a highly publicized case, just before the start of a wedding ceremony in 2003, a groom’s family demanded a dowry of $25,000 in cash, in addition to two televisions, two home theater sets, two refrigerators, two air conditioners, and one car that had already been paid. The bride halted the ceremony and called the police on her cell phone. The family was arrested for violation of the 1961 anti-dowry law. The story appeared in The Times of India with the headline “It Takes Guts to Send Your Groom Packing.”

WESTERN CONTROL OF NEWS MEDIA. Less developed countries fear the effects of the news-gathering capability of the media even more than their entertainment function. The diffusion of information to newspapers around the world is dominated by the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, which are owned by American and British companies, respectively.

The process of gathering news worldwide is expensive, and most newspapers and broadcasters are unable to afford their own correspondents. Instead, they buy the right to use the dispatches of one or more of the main news organizations. The AP transmits most news photographs and provides radio stations around the world with reports from its correspondents.

Similarly, the AP and Reuters Television supply most of the world’s television news video.

The news media in most LDCs are dominated by the government, which typically runs the radio and TV service as well as the domestic news-gathering agency. Newspapers may be owned by the government, a political party, or a private individual, but in any event they are dependent on the government news-gathering organization for information. Sufficient funds are not available to establish a private news service.

Many African and Asian government officials criticize the Western concept of freedom of the press. They argue that the American news organizations reflect American values and do not provide a balanced, accurate view of other countries. U.S. news-gathering organizations are more interested in covering earthquakes, hurricanes, or other sensational disasters than more meaningful but less visual and dramatic domestic stories, such as birth-control programs, health-care innovations, or construction of new roads.

Nevertheless, according to a study by the British Institute of Communications, television newscasts throughout the world allocated the vast majority of time to domestic stories. On the same night, these were the first stories on the most widely watched nationwide newscasts:

- Brazil: traffic jam in Rio de Janeiro
- India: the birthday of the assassinated former prime minister, Indira Gandhi
- Japan: sumo wrestling results
- Kuwait: the day’s activities of the ruling sheik
- Thailand: the increasing cost of eggs
Veteran travelers and journalists invariably pack a portable shortwave radio when they visit other countries. In many regions of the world, the only reliable and unbiased news accounts come from the BBC World, Service shortwave and satellite radio newscasts. Reliance on BBC newscasts is especially strong in war zones.

Environmental Impact of Popular Culture

Popular culture is less likely than folk culture to be distributed with consideration for physical features. The spatial organization of popular culture reflects the distribution of social and economic features. In a global economy and culture, popular culture appears increasingly uniform.

Modifying Nature

Popular culture can significantly modify or control the environment. It may be imposed on the environment rather than spring forth from it, as with many folk customs. For many popular customs the environment is something to be modified to enhance participation in a leisure activity or to promote the sale of a product. Even if the resulting built environment looks “natural,” it is actually the deliberate creation of people in pursuit of popular social customs.

DIFFUSION OF GOLF. Golf courses, because of their large size (80 hectares, or 200 acres), provide a prominent example of imposing popular culture on the environment. A surge in U.S. golf popularity has spawned construction of roughly 200 courses during the past two decades. Geographer John Rooney attributes this to increased income and leisure time, especially among recently retired older people and younger people with flexible working hours.

According to Rooney, the provision of golf courses is not uniform across the United States. Although perceived as a warm-weather sport, the number of golf courses per person is actually greatest in north-central states, from Kansas to North Dakota, as well as the northeastern states abutting the Great Lakes, from Wisconsin to upstate New York (Figure 4-16). People in these regions have a long tradition of playing golf, and social clubs with golf courses are important institutions in the fabric of the regions’ popular customs.

In contrast, access to golf courses is more limited in the South, in California, and in the heavily urbanized Middle Atlantic region between New York City and Washington, D.C. Rapid population growth in the South and West and lack of land on which to build in the Middle Atlantic region have reduced the number of courses per capita. However, selected southern and western areas, such as coastal South Carolina, southern Florida, and central Arizona, have high concentrations of golf courses as a result of the arrival of large numbers of golf-playing northerners, either as vacationers or as permanent residents.

Golf courses are designed partially in response to local physical conditions. Grass species are selected to thrive in the local climate and still be suitable for the needs of greens, fairways, and roughs. Existing trees and native vegetation are retained if possible (few fairways in Michigan are lined by palms). Yet, like other popular customs, golf courses remake the environment—creating or flattening hills, cutting grass or letting it grow tall, carting in or digging up sand for traps, and draining or expanding bodies of water to create hazards.

Uniform Landscapes

The distribution of popular culture around the world tends to produce more uniform landscapes. The spatial expression of a popular custom in one location will be similar to another. In fact, promoters of popular culture want a uniform appearance to generate “product recognition” and greater consumption.

FAST-FOOD RESTAURANTS. The diffusion of fast-food restaurants is a good example of such uniformity. Such restaurants are usually organized as franchises. A franchise is a company’s agreement with businesspeople in a local area to market that company’s product. The franchise agreement lets the local outlet use the company’s name, symbols, trademarks, methods, and architectural styles. To both local residents and travelers, the buildings are immediately recognizable as part of a national or multinational company. A uniform sign is prominently displayed.

Much of the attraction of fast-food restaurants comes from the convenience of the product and the use of the building as a low-cost socializing location for teenagers or families with

Beijing McDonald’s. U.S. fast-food chains have diffused to other countries, including China. Corporate logos enable customers to instantly identify the establishment regardless of whether they know the language.
young children. At the same time, the success of fast-food restaurants depends on large-scale mobility: people who travel or move to another city immediately recognize a familiar place. Newcomers to a particular place know what to expect in the restaurant, because the establishment does not reflect strange and unfamiliar local customs that could be uncomfortable.

Fast-food restaurants were originally developed to attract people who arrived by car. The buildings generally were brightly colored, even gaudy, to attract motorists. Recently built fast-food restaurants are more subdued, with brick facades, pseudo-antique fixtures, and other stylistic details. To facilitate reuse of the structure in case the restaurant fails, company signs are often free-standing rather than integrated into the building design.

**FIGURE 4-16** The 50 best-served and worst-served metropolitan areas in terms of the number of golf holes per capita. In the north-central states, people have a long tradition of playing golf, even if it is confined to summer months. The ratio is less favorable for golfers in the large urban areas of the East Coast, as well as in the rapidly growing areas of the South and West.
Uniformity in the appearance of the landscape is promoted by a wide variety of other popular structures in North America, such as gas stations, supermarkets, and motels. These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, even if not the name of the company.

**GLOBAL DIFFUSION OF UNIFORM LANDSCAPES.** Physical expression of uniformity in popular culture has diffused from North America to other parts of the world. American motels and fast-food chains have opened in other countries. These establishments appeal to North American travelers, yet most customers are local residents who wish to sample American customs they have seen on television.

Diffusion of popular culture across Earth is not confined to products that originate in North America. With faster communications and transportation, customs from anyplace on Earth can rapidly diffuse elsewhere. Japanese vehicles and electronics, for example, have diffused in recent years to the rest of the world, including North America. Until the 1970s, vehicles produced in North America, Europe, and Japan differed substantially in appearance and size, but in recent years styling has become more uniform, largely because of consumer preference around the world for Japanese vehicles. Automakers such as General Motors, Ford, Toyota, and Honda now manufacture similar models in North and South America, Europe, and Asia, instead of separately designed models for each continent.

**Negative Environmental Impact**

The diffusion of some popular customs can adversely impact environmental quality in two ways—depletion of scarce natural resources and pollution of the landscape.

**INCREASED DEMAND FOR NATURAL RESOURCES.** Diffusion of some popular customs increases demand for raw materials, such as minerals and other substances found beneath Earth's surface. The depletion of resources used to produce energy, especially petroleum, is discussed in Chapter 14.

Popular culture may demand a large supply of certain animals, resulting in depletion or even extinction of some species. For example, some animals are killed for their skins, which can be shaped into fashionable clothing and sold to people living thousands of kilometers from the animals' habitat. The skins of the mink, lynx, jaguar, kangaroo, and whale have been heavily consumed for various articles of clothing, to the point that the survival of these species is endangered. This unbalances ecological systems of which the animals are members. Folk culture may also encourage the use of animal skins, but the demand is usually smaller than for popular culture.

Increased demand for some products can strain the capacity of the environment. An important example is increased meat consumption. This has not caused extinction of cattle and poultry; we simply raise more. But animal consumption is an inefficient way for people to acquire calories—90 percent less efficient than if people simply ate grain directly.

To produce 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of beef sold in the supermarket, nearly 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of grain are consumed by the animal. For every kilogram of chicken, nearly 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of grain are consumed by the fowl. This grain could be fed to people directly, bypassing the inefficient meat step. With a large percentage of the world's population undernourished, some question this inefficient use of grain to feed animals for eventual human consumption.

**POLLUTION.** Popular culture also can pollute the environment. The environment can accept and assimilate some level of waste from human activities. But popular culture generates a high volume of waste—solids, liquids, and gases—that must be absorbed into the environment. Although waste is discharged in all three forms, the most visible is solid waste—cans, bottles, old cars, paper, and plastics. These products are often discarded rather than recycled. With more people adopting popular customs worldwide, this problem grows.

Folk culture, like popular culture, can also cause environmental damage, especially when natural processes are ignored. A widespread belief exists that indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere practiced more "natural," ecologically sensitive agriculture before the arrival of Columbus and other Europeans. Geographers increasingly question this. In reality, pre-Columbian folk customs included burning grasslands for planting and hunting, cutting extensive forests, and overhunting some species. Very high rates of soil erosion have been documented in Central America from the practice of folk culture.

The more developed societies that produce endless supplies for popular culture have created the technological capacity both to create large-scale environmental damage and to control it. However, a commitment of time and money must be made to control the damage. Adverse environmental impact of popular culture is further examined in Chapter 14.

**SUMMARY**

Material culture can be divided into two types—folk and popular. Folk culture most often exists among small, homogeneous groups living in relative isolation at a low level of economic development. Popular culture is characteristic of societies with good communications and transportation, which enable rapid diffusion of uniform concepts. Geographers are concerned with several aspects of folk and popular culture.
Folk culture is especially interesting to geographers, because its distribution is relatively clustered, and its preservation can be seen as enhancing diversity in the world. Popular culture is important, too, because it derives from the high levels of material wealth characteristic of societies that are economically developed. As societies seek to improve their economic level, they may abandon traditional folk culture and embrace popular culture associated with MDCs.

Underlying the patterns of material culture are differences in the ways people relate to their environment. Material culture contributes to the modification of the environment, and in turn, nature influences the cultural values of an individual or a group.

Geographers, then, classify culture into popular and folk based on differences in the ways the environment is modified, and meaning is derived from environmental conditions. Popular culture makes relatively extensive modifications of the environment, given society’s greater technological means and inclination to do so. Here again are the key issues concerning folk and popular culture:

1. Where do folk and popular cultures originate and diffuse?
Because of distinctive processes of origin and diffusion, folk culture has different distribution patterns than does popular culture.

Folk culture is more likely to have an anonymous origin and to diffuse slowly through migration, whereas popular culture is more likely to be invented and diffused rapidly with the use of modern communications.

2. Why is folk culture clustered?
Unique regions of folk culture arise because of lack of interaction among groups, even those living nearby. Folk culture is more likely to be influenced by the local environment.

3. Why is popular culture widely distributed?
Popular culture diffuses rapidly across Earth, facilitated by modern communications, especially television. Differences in popular culture are more likely to be observed in one place at different points in time than among different places at one point in time.

4. Why does globalization of popular culture cause problems?
Geographers observe two kinds of problems from diffusion of popular culture across the landscape. First, popular culture—generally originating in Western MDCs—may cause elimination of some folk culture. Second, popular culture may adversely affect the environment.

---

**CASE STUDY REVISITED**

**The Aboriginal Artists Return to Australia**

The Aboriginal Artists of Australia and their audience in New York’s Lincoln Center highlight the contrast between folk culture—rooted in the uniqueness of an isolated landscape—and popular culture, which imposes uniform standards on the landscape. Will the Aboriginal dancers maintain their traditions? Or will they be enticed by the consumer goods characteristic of popular customs, such as televisions and cars? What from the United States did they take back with them to Australia?

Many Aboriginals were not given the choice of maintaining their traditional folk customs or becoming part of popular culture. Between 1910 and 1970 the Australian government forcibly removed nearly 100,000 Aboriginal children from their families. Selected children usually had a white father or grandfather. Children with lighter skins were adopted by white families, whereas darker skinned children were placed in orphanages. Because those with the darkest skins were not included in the program, mothers tried to hold on to their light-skinned babies by rubbing charcoal on them.

The Australian government removed Aboriginal youngsters from their homes in the belief that growing up in the country’s dominant white society would be in the best interest of the children. Aboriginals would soon die out from a low fertility rate and, with them, their folk culture, including the use of 400 languages.

The Aboriginal removal program has been terminated, but the number of Aboriginals in Australia is now less than one-half million, less than 3 percent of the national population.

A group of Aboriginals perform a corroboree dance teaching the traditional Aboriginal legends of hunting and killing animals.

The folk culture of the remaining Aboriginals will now be preserved through groups such as the Australian Artists rather than obliterated. But the experience of the Aboriginals demonstrates how frail the preservation of folk culture can be in the face of popular culture.
KEY TERMS

Custom (p. 114)  Habit (p. 114)  Taboo (p. 122)
Folk culture (p. 114)  Popular culture (p. 114)  Terroir (p. 121)

THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

1. Should geographers regard culture and social customs as meaningful generalizations about a group of people, or should they concentrate on understanding how specific individuals interact with the physical environment? Why?

2. In what ways might gender affect the distribution of social customs in a community?

3. Are there examples of groups, either in more developed countries or in less developed countries, that have successfully resisted the diffusion of popular customs? Describe such a group and tell how it has succeeded in preserving its culture.

4. Which elements of the physical environment are emphasized in the portrayal of various places on television?

5. Which images of social customs do countries depict in campaigns to promote tourism? To what extent do these images reflect local social customs realistically?

FURTHER READINGS


