



23 Culture and Development

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we looked at the difficult concept of culture, its varied manifestations, and its relationship to development. One of the main goals has been to dispel the many myths that surround the concept of culture. While the increasing focus on culture is justifiable, societal processes cannot be reduced to a single explanatory variable. In reality, these processes cannot as easily be broken down into various elements, such as culture, politics, and economics, as they are in academic analysis. All elements are interlinked and cannot be abstracted and studied in isolation. Therefore, development does not make sense at all without an understanding of the meanings and the cultural value attributed to it by the people who are subjected to it. At the same time, these meanings cannot be entirely disparate because of certain universal features of the human condition—and also because the same material processes of commodification and marketization are taking place across the world. The task for the development studies student is to negotiate the lines between acknowledging the importance of agency, the process of creating meanings, and understanding the structural limitations imposed by material factors on the imagination of the symbolic.

VIDEO RESOURCES

Cultural Relativism, Sociology, Chegg Tutors

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nUn2DyORqk>

Time 3:58

Cultural relativism is the principle of regarding the beliefs, values, and practices of a culture from the viewpoint of that culture itself. Originating in the work of Franz Boas in the early twentieth century, cultural relativism has greatly influenced social sciences such as anthropology. In sociology, the prin-

principle is sometimes practiced to avoid cultural bias in research, as well as to avoid judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture. For this reason, cultural relativism has been considered an attempt to avoid ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism is related to but often distinguished from moral relativism, the view that morality is relative to a standard, especially a cultural standard.

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Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism in group and out group

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIXAeOnU520>

Time 8:42

A video recorded by Khan Academy. Khan Academy offers practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalized learning dashboard that empower learners to study at their own pace in and outside of the classroom. We tackle math, science, computer programming, history, art history, economics, and more. Our math missions guide learners from kindergarten to calculus using state-of-the-art, adaptive technology that identifies strengths and learning gaps. We've also partnered with institutions like NASA, The Museum of Modern Art, The California Academy of Sciences, and MIT to offer specialized content.

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Why Pop Culture?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_3UYncNwz4

Time 12:47

What is the role popular culture plays in expressing our values of community? Take a fresh look at the icons that our collective consciousness brings to the surface and the rituals that celebrate them with this entertaining documentary filmmaker.

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Europa Rises - European Nationalism 2014

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6r6IvOuc50>

Time 9:45

A video showing the state countries within Europe are currently in but also showing the fast growing, nationalist groups/movements. This year we will see an even bigger shift to the right, history will repeat itself and each nation will regain their sovereignty and their national pride. Over the last 60 years or so we have lost touch with our roots and traditions, we need to bring back natural family values and roles. We will no longer be consumed by greed, individualism and degeneracy, we will be bonded by our race, heritage, culture and tradition.

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Edward Said On Orientalism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g

Time 40:31

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* has been profoundly influential in a diverse range of disciplines since its publication in 1978. In this engaging (and lavishly illustrated) interview he talks about the context within which the book was conceived, its main themes and how its original thesis relates to the contemporary understanding of "the Orient." Said argues that the Western (especially American) understanding of the Middle East as a place full of villains and terrorists ruled by Islamic fundamentalism produces a deeply distorted image of the diversity and complexity of millions of Arab peoples.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How and in what ways is the link between culture and development defined?
2. What is the so-called “Asian values” theory?
3. Explain the materialist and idealist views of culture.
4. What are several problems with post-modern perspectives on culture and development?
5. How has the term culture been defined?
6. Explain the relevance of Protestant ethics to development.
7. Briefly explain the American dream.

ANSWER KEY: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. The adoption of modernization and scientific rationality has led to an inevitable conflict between the world views of the modernizing elites and the masses who still continue traditional ways of living. Therefore, development in many southern societies has seen rural peasants being subjected to policies constructed by the educated bureaucrats from the cities. One example is the relief package announced by the government of India in 2006 for the debt-ridden farmers of western India, which included the distribution of cattle to people who had never used them before and in a region that is deficient in water and fodder. Ultimately, the result of the government's promoting dairying in a region not suited for it was that the farmers spent a lot of labour time in tending to the cattle, as well as the equivalent of three people's daily wages on the sustenance of one cow, with hardly any return from it (Sainath, 2006). Such examples abound in the history of the development era, not only in the South but also in the North–South relationship, seen especially in the devastating policies designed by institutions like the World Bank without due consideration to the local, material, and cultural contexts of a region. (p. 443)
2. This notion is put forward as an attempt to legitimize elite rule by reference to the supposedly special characteristics of Asian culture. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister, argued that Asian culture is more conducive to order and discipline than to freedom and liberty (which are Western cultural traits). This thesis has often been used to explain the economic success of Japan, China, South Korea, etc. However, this is problematic for a number of reasons. Namely, it homogenizes a very large and diverse area. If culture is the explanatory factor (and usually religious values are mentioned), how do we explain the success of both Islamic Indonesia and Shinto Japan? Clearly, culture is not the only factor, if it even plays a role at all. (p. 457)
3. The materialist position contends that material factors are the most important in explaining social change. The idealist position, by contrast, focuses on cultural factors and ideas. However, neither view by itself is sufficient for understanding culture or development. For instance, to understand poverty or a lack of economic growth by reference to "backward" mentalities in society misses the role played by power relations that develop within an economic system. Focusing only on ideas or mentalities has led to blaming the poor for their condition, without considering the possibilities that structural factors might be at play. (p. 446)
4. Post-modernism has extreme views of modernity and development, and is counterproductive for those who are marginalized and oppressed. Culture is treated as an all-encompassing explanatory variable, yet it seems detached from any other element. In other words, culture is treated as a homogenous entity. Their concern about universalizing modernity and the Western experience make them uncritically accept "tradition" as beneficial. In doing so, post-modern views play into a discourse that defends tradition, religion, and community while ignoring internal hierarchies and oppressions within those traditional forms. Such views fall into cultural relativism since they cannot accept *any* form of universalism. (pp. 508–508)
5. Common definitions of culture include (1) a progressive process of human development, movement toward order away from barbarism; (2) culture as a specific way of life, expressing meanings and values in art, education, institutions, and daily life; (3) culture as symbolic, that is, embodying the various constructed and subjective meanings in the world (pp. 443–444)
6. The most famous theory regarding cultural influence on economic behaviour is Max Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic, in which certain characteristics of Protestantism (especially Calvinism), such as valuing austerity, discipline, and hard work to attain material wealth and success as a route to personal salvation, were considered by Weber as having played a major role in the origin of capitalism. The theory has been criticized heavily for its inability to explain the economic success of Catholic countries such as France and Italy and non-Christian Asian countries

in the twentieth century. However, the Japanese economic miracle has been attributed to a different set of cultural values, “which emphasized group responsibility, company loyalty, interpersonal trust and implicit contracts that bind individual conduct.” These values originate from a variety of cultural traditions, including Japan’s history of feudalism, Confucian ethics, and the “Samurai code of honour” (Sen, 2001: 6–7, 11). In “transitional” and “developing” countries, it is claimed that one of the important cultural barriers to efficient economic growth is the problem of corruption. Former socialist economies such as those of Russia and Eastern European countries are examples of this phenomenon. (p. 447)

7. An example of how certain ideas gain universal acceptance and acquire an ideological form is the idea of the “American dream,” according to which if a person has talent and works hard, she or he can lead a successful and prosperous life. This dream drives millions of people from all over the world to move to the US. While the concept contains an element of truth, it hides the fact that the United States, despite its wealth, is the least egalitarian society in the Global North, and structural inequalities based on class and race (among other factors) prevent a majority of immigrants from attaining their dream. (p. 449)