12 Cultural diffusion: the process

Culture can be defined as the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared basis of social action. It is the way of life of a particular society or group of people. Culture is important in interpreting and making sense of the world. It can determine people's attitudes to the issues affecting them and give them a sense of identity. Figure 1 shows Lloyd Kwast's model of culture.

Culture's history has led to a wondrous blending of cultures. Mexico's history has been a rich source of cultural traits known as cultural hearths. The Tierras and Euphrates valleys in modern-day Iraq where the world's first cities developed is a major example. Culture diffuses outwards from cultural hearths. Culture is a major aspect of people's lives. It affects how people relate to family members, to other people in their community and to people further afield. Cultural development is a process and it is therefore dynamic rather than static. Outside influences may have a very significant impact on traditions that have developed over many years. Figure 2 is an assessment of Mexican culture from a source that looks at a range of cultures around the world.

**KEY QUESTIONS**

- How can cultural traits be described in terms of language, customs, beliefs, dress, images, music, food and technology?
- How have cultural traits diffused through the international movement of workers, tourists and commodities?

The natural environment can significantly affect the lifestyle of the people in a country or region, thus shaping their culture. Differences in culture in a region or country may create tensions, as numerous examples over time have shown.

Cultural traits or characteristics can be recognised in terms of:

- language
- customs
- beliefs
- dress
- images

Music

Food

Technology

An area that has been a rich source of cultural traits is known as a cultural hearth. The Tierras and Euphrates valleys in modern-day Iraq where the world's first cities developed is a major example. Culture diffuses outwards from cultural hearths. Culture is a major aspect of people's lives. It affects how people relate to family members, to other people in their community and to people further afield. Cultural development is a process and it is therefore dynamic rather than static. Outside influences may have a very significant impact on traditions that have developed over many years. Figure 2 is an assessment of Mexican culture from a source that looks at a range of cultures around the world.

Mexico's history has led to a wondrous blending of cultures. Find out what makes Mexican culture unique.

You have to visit Mexico once to witness the colorful culture that makes the country such a vivacious place to live in. The Mexican spirit is exemplified by the culture of the charro, or Mexican cowboy. It is a rich legacy of tradition and valor, of war and peace.

Once in Mexico, you can glimpse an intriguing blend of Native American traditions and Spanish colonial influences in Mexican culture. Mexicans have for centuries been known for their distinguished ceramics, music, painting, sculpture, textiles and poetry, but after the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century, Mexican art and culture saw an amalgamation of Native American arts with the European way of life.

This led to the evolution of a unique Mexican culture. Interestingly, the growth of Mexican culture is not limited to Spanish colonisation; greatly developed cultures, including those of the Olmecs, Mayas, Toltecs, and Aztecs, existed long before the Spanish conquest.

The colonial role of the Spaniards, which lasted for nearly 300 years, saw the construction of many churches, which are a blending of Spanish architectural designs with the handbook of Native American workers who built and decorated the buildings. These Christian churches were supposed to replace the pagan structures. Not just churches, even the basic design of most of Mexico's towns, are influenced by the design of many of the older cities in Spain. The indigenous arts were regarded as an important part of the national revival after the revolution. Renowned artists like Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco were commissioned to decorate important public buildings with large, vivid murals on social and historical themes. Many of these buildings exist to this day as thriving communities with magnificent cultural heritage.

Mexico City is the country's cultural epicenter of fine arts, museums, and music, but spectacular cultural treasures can be found throughout the country. Present-day Mexico is bursting with music and littered with galleries of contemporary and historic art, which are a highlight of the country for many tourists. Mexico City and Oaxaca are particularly considered to be booming in contemporary arts scenes. The country's vibrant folk-art tradition has also contributed to Mexican culture in a big way.

Ther is diversity of customs, language, dress and food in culturally vibrant Mexico. Spanish is the national language of Mexico. But Mexican Spanish differs from Castilian Spanish, the literary and official language of Spain, in two aspects.

In Mexico, the Castilian tsip has more or less disappeared, and numerous indigenous words have been adopted. Around 50 indigenous languages are spoken by about 7 million people in Mexico. A majority of the Mexican population have a Catholic faith. Christianity was introduced to the residents by the colonial masters. As far as dressing goes, the people of Mexico who live in small villages normally wear trousers, sombreros, cotton shirts and ponchos. In cities people generally wear fashion borrowed from Europe and the US. Clothing in Mexico changes according to the season. However, one of the hallmarks of Mexican clothing is woven fabrics. Woven clothing is worn by many people in Mexico.

The people of Mexico are generally very warm and gracious and believe strongly in their family and religion. Exchanging proper greetings is considered very important among the Mexican social milieu. Although Mexican people are hard-working, they are not very rich. They believe in enjoying a reasonable quiet life, taking pleasure in their siestas.

Real Mexican food is quite unlike the dishes found in most Mexican and Tex-Mex restaurants in other countries. Tortillas, beans and chili peppers are the staple foods of Mexican people. Tortillas are thin flour patties made of pressed corn or wheat-flour dough cooked on griddles. Beans of different varieties are most commonly boiled and fried. They can be a main ingredient in a meal or served almost as a garnish. Jugs, which is a kind of fruit juice, is a popular drink and is available everywhere. Mexico is also famous for its alcoholic beverages - mezcal and tequila in particular.

Today, Mexican society is slowly evolving from a traditionalistic government setup to a more democratic society. The government has taken steps toward improving literacy and education in the past few years - an indicator of progress.
The mixing of cultures is a major dimension of globalisation. This has occurred through:

- migration, which circulates ideas, values and beliefs around the world
- the rapid spread of news, ideas and fashions through the mass media, trade and travel
- the growth of global brands such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's, which serve as common reference points – the terms 'Americanisation' and 'McDonaldisation' are often used to describe global consumer culture
- the Internet which has allowed individual and mass communication on a scale never available before
- the transport revolution which has facilitated the mass movement of people and products around the world.

The term cultural hybridity is used to describe the extent to which cultures are intermixed. This process has been important to the success of many TNCs. The power of brands and their global marketing strategies cannot be underestimated. The increasing knowledge of Western consumer culture in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Cold War was an important factor in the eventual disintegration of the Eastern Bloc.

However, in spite of the significant impact of globalisation on cultures around the world, it is important not to exaggerate the changes that have taken place. Considerable cultural differences remain, with some writers using terms such as 'culture wars' and 'clashes of civilisations'.

### Aspects of culture

#### Language

Language is an essential part of national identity and culture, although it is not always restricted by geographical borders. Culture is transmitted through a range of activities involving language, including speech, literature and song. Human interaction depends almost totally on language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st language</th>
<th>2nd language</th>
<th>Total (million speakers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>873 178 1051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>120 490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>70 420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>170 510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>24 284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>10 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>19 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>110 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>1 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>128 229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Major first and second languages around the world.

Some languages have over 100 million native speakers. The United Nations has six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The official language is the language of a country, region or institution that is embodied in law. Table 1 shows the major first and second languages around the world, while Table 2 lists the countries with the greatest variety of languages.

### Table 1: Countries with the greatest variety of languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of languages</th>
<th>Total population (million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo, Dem. Rep.</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows the official languages of Africa. For many African countries the official language is a remnant of colonial rule, with the old colonial powers often retaining strong links with their former colonies. These links are often political, economic, social and cultural. The evidence of cultural association is most obvious through a shared language, but it can also involve many other facets of life.

Poster for the musical Cats in Beijing.
Catalan nationalism. The global symbol of Catalan nationalism is the Barcelona football club. In the north of Spain over half a million people speak Basque. Some Basques feel so strongly about how different they are from the rest of Spain that they want their own separate country. A very small minority are members of the terrorist group ETA.

English has become the language of the ‘global village’ with a significant number of people around the world speaking English as a second language. This is often important to them in gaining access to the world of information and in providing greater employment opportunities. It also provides the greatest degree of access to global consumer culture.

**Customs**

**Customs** can be described as the established patterns of behaviour that are commonplace within a particular country, region or social setting. A custom is a long-standing practice handed down from one generation to the next. Some national customs are well known internationally, but most will not be until you conduct some research about them. It is useful to know something about the most important customs in a country before visiting. Such awareness is generally appreciated and it also avoids inadvertently causing offence. Japan has a number of particular customs:

- **Bowing** – an important form of respect. The duration and inclination of the bow is proportionate to the status of the person being addressed. It is very important for visiting politicians and business people to get this right and not cause offence.
- **No tipping** – to tip someone is seen as a little insulting. This is very different to many other countries where tipping is the expectation.
- **Thresholds** – people are expected to take off their shoes at the entrance of all homes, and most businesses and hotels. While this is common in a number of countries in terms of people’s homes, it is very unusual in other countries for people to be expected to remove shoes in commercial establishments.

- **Conformity** – Japanese society is focused on the group rather than the individual. This is very different to societies in the West.

Celebrating St Patrick’s Day on 17 March is perhaps Ireland’s most well-known custom which communities in many other countries now also acknowledge. In Ireland St Patrick’s Day is a public holiday. Virtually all countries have public holidays to celebrate particularly important aspects of their culture. Customs can also relate to leisure activities. In France, playing boules is a common custom, particularly among men at the weekend.

**Beliefs**

Arguably, the first true examples of global networks evolved in the form of world religions. Both Christianity and Islam can be viewed as global in their extent while the other four main religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Taoism are more regional in their scope (Figure 4).

Religious beliefs were a very strong aspect of culture in virtually all parts of the world in the past. However, secularism has gained a strong hold in many parts of the Western world in particular, so large sections of populations either have no religious beliefs at all or simply practise the traditional family religion but without real faith. Such societies can find other societies whose beliefs are very strong worrying and even threatening. Radical Islam is the most obvious case to point, but Christian fundamentalism is strong in places like the southern parts of the USA. In some Islamic countries religious leaders hold a great deal of power or may even control the country (a theocracy).

Iran’s government is described as a ‘theocratic republic’. Iran’s head of state, or Supreme Leader, is an Islamic cleric appointed for life by an elected body called the Assembly of Experts. The Supreme Leader and other clerics determine legislation in line with Islamic law and customs (the Sharia) and can bar candidates from elections. Saudi Arabia’s legal system is based entirely on Islamic law which puts prohibitions on many things including cross-Musulm proselytism, alcohol, pork products and fornication. It also
dictates aspects of economic life, for example the rules for Islamic banking which differ significantly from those of capitalist commercial banks.

To complicate matters, Islam, like Christianity, is not one single unified religion. There are different branches or sects and the differences between them can lead to considerable tensions, such as with the Islamic Sunnis and Shia sects in Iraq, and the Christian Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

Various secular ideologies have evolved alongside the development of national cultures. The conflict between capitalism and communism was the major global political divide in the second half of the 20th century.

Dress

Dress is an important part of daily life. Through clothing, individuals establish their individual sense of being as well as their place in society. Dress can mark out a person’s job and their position in a community. In national terms dress may in part be a response to climate.

Cultural traits in terms of dress are far less distinctive in most countries than they used to be, as international casual and business dress has become the global norm. It is usually the older age group in a country that clings to traditional dress when the younger generation has abandoned it. Traditional dress may be worn on certain special days. It can also be an important part of the tourist industry in many areas.

Dress not only marks economic and social change, but also important political watershed. For example, the communist revolution in China in 1947 brought a strict uniformity in terms of dress. The opening up of the economy to the outside world from the late 1970s saw the norms on dress relaxed.

The dress code of a culture is often stricter for women than for men. In traditional Islam the burqa is seen as essential for women to wear in public. This has resulted in fierce opposition in a number of countries, mainly in Europe. In January 2010 the head of President Nicolas Sarkozy’s political party in France said that Muslim women wearing full-face veils should not be granted French nationality.

Images

Advances in telecommunications allow cultural images, of people and places, to flow around the world as never before. Cultural images may be:

- political
- economic
- social
- environmental
- historic.

Some images may be very recent while others have been perpetuated from earlier generations. For example, the popular images that many people have of the UK are of bowler hats, Buckingham Palace, London’s red buses and the black London taxis. These are all traditional images. More modern images of the UK include Britpop and art, the English Premier League (football), David Beckham and the London Eye. The 32-capsule observation wheel overlooking the River Thames and the Houses of Parliament is the highest of its kind in the world and has become one of the most recognisable global images.

Imagery is important because it helps to portray a country in either positive or negative terms. Germany still suffers from images of the concentration camps of the Second World War and other aspects of the Nazi era. In contrast, images of modern Germany are frequently associated with the country’s high standing in technology, particularly in relation to the car industry.

The images that people of a certain culture have of themselves are often quite different from the images that other people have of that particular culture. The latter are often stereotypes and as a result may bear little relation to reality. Stereotypes can cause offence and can become the cause of friction.

Music

Music is an essential part of most cultures, and because it does not depend on written or spoken communication explicitly for its major impact, it can diffuse easily from one culture to many others. However, the global music industry is dominated by a small number of extremely large TNCs with their origins in the West, rock and pop music have transcended cultures more than any other genre.

Food

Certain countries and cultures are internationally known for their food. The evidence is in restaurants with national identities, Italian, French, Mexican, Chinese, Indian and Thai restaurants are associated with particular countries and are also frequently found elsewhere. It is easy to think of the particular foods that are associated with such restaurants.
Why would it be a rarity to find restaurants associated with Russia, the UK, Germany and Bolivia in other countries? Food is an important part of religious observance and spiritual ritual for many faiths. In Judaism, ‘kosher’ means that a food is fit or permitted. Foods must be prepared in the right way in order to be kosher; for example, animals that provide meat must be slaughtered correctly. Foods such as pork and shellfish are strictly forbidden. The Jewish ‘food laws’ originated more than 3000 years ago and contribute to a formal code of behaviour that reinforces the identity of a Jewish community. Food forms an integral part of religion in a practice Jew, but of course not all Jews follow this code.

In Islam, the concept of ‘halal’, meaning lawful or permitted, is applied to all areas of a person’s life and includes regulations surrounding food. All foods are allowed (halal), except for those that are considered harmful. Prohibited foods (and other aspects of life) are called ‘haram’. The list of haram foods includes pork, alcohol and any products that contain embalming fluids made from animal fats, particularly margarine.

Some Catholic and Orthodox Christians observe a number of fast and feast days during the year. For example, they may fast or avoid meat on Fridays and during Lent. Fish is a common alternative.

**Research idea**

Conduct a survey to list restaurants associated with countries in the area in which you live. What are the reasons for the location of these restaurants?

**Activities**

1. Define (a) culture and (b) cultural traits.
2. Use an example to explain the meaning of a cultural hearth.
3. With reference to Figure 2 (page 143), write a 100-word summary of Mexican culture.
4. Explain cultural hybridity.
5. Why is language such an important part of culture?
6. Identify three well-known customs in the country in which you live. What is your opinion of these customs?
7. Why are differences in dress between cultures less prominent than they were 50 years ago?
8. Why is food a significant aspect of culture?
9. Give two examples of the way in which cultures can differ in their attitudes to technology.

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**Technology**

The development of new technology can result in cultural change. Gordon Chidle used the term ‘urban revolution’ to describe the change in society marked by the emergence of the first cities some 5500 years ago. The catalyst for this period of rapid change was the Neolithic Revolution which occurred about 8000 BC. This was when sedentary farming, based on the domestication of animals and cereal farming, steadily replaced a nomadic way of life. The areas where these new technologies were introduced experienced much more rapid cultural change than the parts of the world excluded from such innovations. The Industrial Revolution began in the UK and many of its most important inventions are still associated with that country. In modern times Japan and Germany are particularly noted for their expertise in technology, a trait that a number of other countries are trying to emulate.

Cultures can differ significantly in their attitudes to different technologies. Here moral and ethical norms come into play. Examples include:

- Nuclear electricity and power
- Medical procedures such as abortion
- The use of contraception
- GM crops

Some societies are more strongly against technologies that are perceived to have high environmental impact. Cultural norms with regard to human reproduction can also vary significantly.

**The diffusion of cultural traits**

**Cultural diffusion** is the process of the spreading of cultural traits from one place to another. Cultures change at different speeds across space and time. Cultures move in both real space and cyberspace. Cultural traits can be diffused in a number of ways, in particular by the movement of workers, tourists and commodities. The influence of globalisation on cultural landscapes relates to the connectivity of that landscape to global networks and to the geographical and historical processes that have shaped a particular place or country. Places that have been largely bypassed by globalised cultural flows have been referred to as ‘black holes’.

Historically, migration and the spread of empires were the most important sources of diffusion. Held et al. in Global Transformation: Politics, Economics and Culture argue that although cultural flows from the West to the rest of the world constitute the major global force, a partial reversal is taking place through complex patterns of migration, mass tourism and the growth of new sectors such as the world music industry.

**The international movement of workers**

In recent decades the international movement of workers has spawned a much wider range of countries than ever before. This refers to both countries of origin and destination. There are now about 200 million migrant workers around the world. Migration of labour is a key feature of globalisation and it makes a significant impact on the global economy. Worker migration has become increasingly feminised and is no longer as dominated as it once was by male migration. Migrant workers bring their own cultural traits from the countries they move from, but also pick up aspects of culture from their destination country. Such traits are transmitted back to their country of origin by (a) the short-term and permanent return of migrant workers to their home country and (b) by keeping in touch by phone, letter and ICT and sending goods back. All these modes of contact can communicate cultural aspects of the country the migrant is working in (Figure 5).

The great historic labour migrations including the Atlantic slave trade and the mass migrations from Europe to the ‘New World’ had a phenomenal impact on global cultural diffusion. In more recent times, with low rates of natural population increase in Western countries, migration has accounted for an increasing proportion of population growth. The result has been the establishment of significant diaspora populations in developed countries and growing cultural hybridity.

A recent example is the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 to include Eastern European countries such as Poland. A considerable number of Polish workers migrated to the UK. In areas such as London and Reading where the Polish community concentrated, shops providing goods and services to the expanding Polish community opened up and a number of Catholic churches began offering a weekend mass conducted in the Polish language. The building industry and hotels, pubs and catering attracted particularly large numbers of Polish workers. High immigration from Poland and a number of other countries increased the birth rate in the UK and widened the range of first languages spoken by children in schools. This placed considerable demands on many education authorities.

In the USA the large inflow of migrants from Latin America has resulted in a substantial increase in the proportion of Spanish speakers in the country. Many areas in the southern part of the USA, in states such as California, New Mexico, Texas and Florida, are effectively
bilingual. Many other traits of Latin American culture are also evident in the region. In turn, the contact that migrant workers have with their families and communities elicits a certain reverse flow of cultural traits as workers relate their experiences and send money home.

**Mass tourism**

International tourist arrivals reached a record of almost 900 million in 2007. Between 2000 and 2007 international tourist arrivals rose by 40%. This is an average of 4.5% a year, marking it out as a high growth industry. The growth in international tourism receipts was even stronger at almost 8% usually over the same period.

Recent decades have witnessed the globalisation of international tourism. Figure 6 shows International tourist arrivals by world region 2000-07. The highest rates of growth were in the developing world:

- The Middle East led the way with an average annual growth rate of 10%. Saudi Arabia and Egypt in particular showed strong growth as major resort destinations, while the United Arab Emirates is attracting a growing number of leisure and business travellers.
- The next highest rate of increase was in the Asia-Pacific region with an annual average growth of 8%. This was a result of (1) rapid economic expansion in the region, (2) increased marketing of tourism opportunities and (3) improved transportation infrastructure. Inbound tourism to China is rising rapidly, but outbound travel from China is a major factor in strong tourism growth across the entire Asia-Pacific region.
- Tourism in Africa rose by an average of 6%, led by the adventure tourism sector.
- In comparison with other parts of the developing world the tourism industry in Latin America and the Caribbean recorded much lower growth rates – 3% over the same time period. However, in this region the average growth figures hides a wide variation. Strong growth in many South and Central American countries continued with lower figures in the more mature destinations of the Caribbean and Mexico.
- Although the developed regions of the world remain the largest tourism destinations, their dominance is reducing and recent growth rates have been relatively low. For example, Europe and North America accounted for 60% of international arrivals in 2000, but by 2007 this had fallen to 62%. Europe still accounted for 54% of all international arrivals.

Large-scale international tourism results in varying degrees of cultural diffusion. In some countries it is only tourist enclaves that are significantly affected, whereas in others the impact is more widespread.

The core-periphery enclave model of tourism (Figure 7) proposed by S. Britton in 1981 stresses that in many developing countries the benefits/impact of tourism are very limited geographically. Most tourists come from the developed or core nations. In many developing countries (the periphery) tourists frequently stay in specially designated enclaves with all the required facilities immediately on hand. Outside of the resort enclaves there are a number of attractions (scenic, historic, cultural) at locations that can usually be reached and returned from within a day. At such locations the expected infrastructure is usually provided. Therefore the majority of the country is unaffected by tourism. As a result most tourists have little or no contact with local people and fail to experience the reality of life in the country they have chosen to visit.

The traditional cultures of many communities in the developing world have suffered because of the development of tourism. The adverse impact includes the following in varying degrees:

- There may be a loss of locally owned land as tourism companies buy up large tracts in the most scenic and accessible locations.
- Traditional values and practices may be abandoned by the local people.
- People may be displaced to make way for tourist developments.
- The structure of the local community can change.
- Large companies and governments can abuse the human rights of local people in the quest to maximise profits.
- Alcoholism and drug abuse increase as drink and drugs become more available to satisfy the demands of foreign tourists. It has also been suggested that the very obvious gap in wealth between local people and tourists can result in a certain ‘despair’ among some local people, particularly young adults, who find solace in alcohol and drugs.
- Tourism can increase levels of crime and prostitution, sometimes involving children. ‘Sex tourism’ is a big issue in certain locations such as Bangkok, but it is also prevalent in some degree in most locations visited by large numbers of international tourists. The issue of crime is more complex. Clearly the wealth that foreign visitors bring with them provides more opportunities for local criminals than existed previously but visitors may also commit various crimes themselves.
- Visitor congestion at key locations may hinder the movement of local people.
The global movement of commodities

People around the world have a greater choice of international commodities than ever before, although in many developing countries the prices of such commodities are out of the reach of many people. However, even though people may not have the money to purchase a commodity, they become aware of the lifestyle it attempts to portray because of advertising.

As TNCs have sought to move beyond the often saturated markets of Western countries they have exported Western consumer culture to the developing world on a large scale. Walking around the central business districts of virtually any large town or city in the developing world you will see large numbers of people wearing T-shirts and other clothes advertising major brand names for a range of different products. The global advertising industry is a major factor in the diffusion of cultural traits.

Western fast food chains such as McDonald’s and KFC have played a considerable role in the increase in meat consumption in countries such as China. Diet is a cultural trait that is changing significantly in many newly industrialised countries. Along with such a change in diet often goes changes in eating habits, with fewer family meals as individual family members grab food on the go! Some commodities spread cultural traits more directly than others. The cultural or creative industries are the most direct in spreading cultural traits. Such industries include film, music, publishing, advertising, architecture, fashion, software, toys and games. Trade in cultural products has expanded rapidly in recent decades and is a major aspect of globalisation.

Culture shock

Cultural diffusion is not always a smooth process. Figure 9 shows two paths people can take during the four phases of long-term cross-cultural encounters. The term ‘culture shock’ was coined by Kalvero Öberg in 1954 to describe the difficulties that some people feel when confronted with a significantly different culture to their own.

Review

Examination-style questions

1. a. Describe cultural traits in terms of language, customs and beliefs.
   b. Examine the importance of cultural traits in music, dress and food.

2. a. Describe the general process of the diffusion of Western culture into developing countries.
   b. Discuss the diffusion of cultural traits resulting from the international movement of workers, tourists and commodities.

Key terms

Culture: the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which constitute the shared basis of social action.

Cultural traits: individual components of a cultural complex which may be divided into three categories: sociological, ideological and technological.

Cultural hearth: an area that is or has been a rich source of cultural traits.

Cultural hybridity: the extent to which cultures are intertwined.

Official language: the language of a country, region or institution that is embedded in law.

Bilingual country: a country in which two languages are commonly spoken.

Activities

1. Define ‘cultural diffusion’.
2. Explain the difference between cultures diffusing in real space and cyberspace.
3. What is a ‘block hole’?
4. With reference to Figure 5 (page 151) discuss the role of worker migration in the diffusion of cultural traits.
5. Describe the data presented in Figure 6 (page 151).
6. What roles have the international movement of tourists played in cultural diffusion?
7. How does the international movement of commodities affect the diffusion of cultural traits?

Separatist movements: political parties or other organisations which believe that their region should separate from its current country to form a new country.

Customs: the established patterns of behaviour that are commonplace within a particular country, region or social setting.

Secularism: a view that rejects religion and religious considerations.

Stereotype: a standardised mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgement.

Cultural diffusion: the process of the spreading of cultural traits from one place to another.

Cultural or creative industries: industries that involve the spreading or creating of culture.