

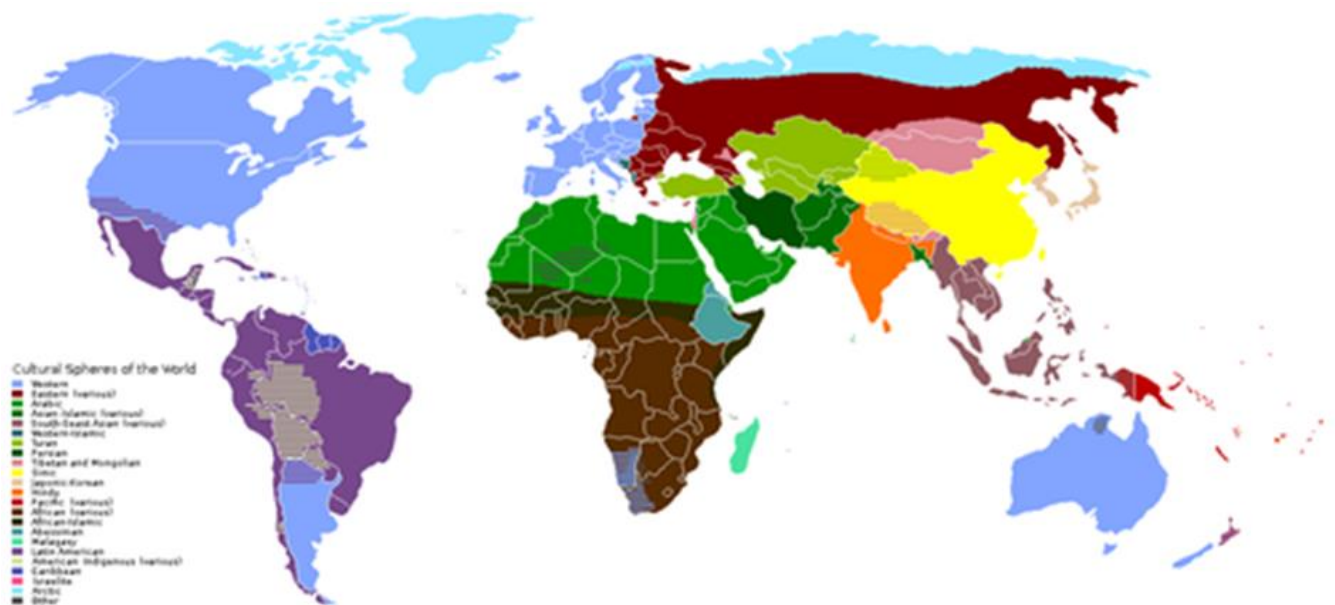
# Geography and Culture: Cultural Interaction of Societies

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## Introduction

Dictionaries define the word *culture* as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” Since geographical factors shape the way of life dramatically, mentioning the definition of the word *geography*, which is “the way all the parts of an area are arranged within it,” would be very important.

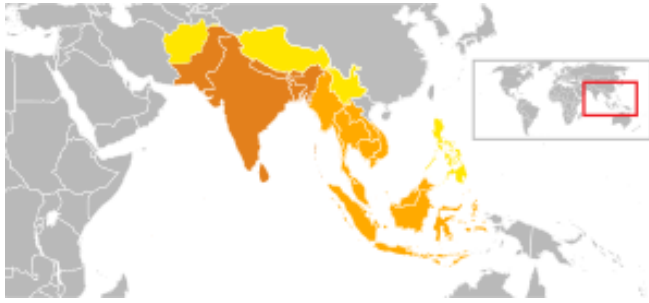
That culture and geography have a relationship with one another sounds quite interesting; nevertheless, it is true. The term *cultural geography* can be defined as “The study of the relationship between culture and place.” In fact, different cultures can be considered in different cultural spheres, which are differentiated with factors such as language, religion, ethnicity, etc. Three examples from different parts of the world show cultural interaction between diverse societies.



\*A map about culture spheres in the world

## India and Southeast Asia

Indian subcontinent not only houses one of the oldest cultures and civilizations but also is the birthplace of two popular religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. The fact that a great cultural power like Indian influences neighboring societies is precise. Indians began to establish trade, cultural and political relations with Southeast Asian kingdoms such as Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia around 290 BC. This led Southeast Asia to “Indianisation,” in the end.



\* The map of Indianisation

As a consequence of Indianisation, Southeast Asian kingdoms converted mainly Buddhism. All of these kingdoms have a Buddhism era in their histories. Today, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam still have a Buddhist majority. Although a Southeast Asian country may have adjusted the main religion, it is possible to see Buddhist templates. For example, Islam-dominated countries like Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia still possess Indo-Buddhist heritage.

Cultural interaction also affected the languages. For instance, in the Thai language, the words *Ratha Mantri*, *Vidhya*, *Samuthra*, *Karuna*, *Gulab*, *Pranee* are almost identical to the Indian versions. This example reveals that nations originating from different places in the world transferred their languages as well as beliefs. Isn't it obvious that nations share many similarities in many facets also have similar habits in their lifestyles?



\* A Buddhist temple in Thailand

## Two Sides of the Aegean Sea: Turkey and Greece

Since the battle of Manzikert in 1071, Greeks and Turks have lived in the same area; consequently, become neighbors. They lived together for roughly 700 years; therefore, these two culturally and ethnically diverse societies influenced one another in many aspects though separated countries were formed then. These two UN and NATO members share many similarities as many as disputes.

Modern Greek history began in 1830 after achieving independence from the Ottoman Empire. After that date, they enlarged their territories with the Greek-speaking majority. An unsuccessful attempt to take Western Anatolia was made by Greeks in 1919-1923, which initiated the formation of the modern Turkish Republic. Although sometimes a positive atmosphere can be seen between these

countries, very serious conflicts such as Aegean and Mediterranean coasts and Cyprus prevent friendly attitude towards one another.

In the religious aspect, a marked contrast between Greeks and Turks exists. Christianity is the major faith in Greece with 98%, while Islam dominates the Turkish society with a rate of 99%. However, except for the consumption of alcohol and pork, Greek and Turkish people share many similarities as both of them are the Mediterranean. One would see friendly behavior from both Greeks and Turks. Friendships and family members are extremely valuable in both cultures. Most importantly, they cannot say “No” when Sirtaki music is playing.

Greek and Turkish have totally different languages owing to the fact that Greek is a member of the Indo-European language family, yet Turkish is originated from the Turkic language family. Nonetheless, this difference doesn't mean that they don't have similarities. To exemplify, the English word *boat* means *kaiki* in Greek and *kayık* in Turkish, also the English *pocket* is *tsepi* in Greek and *cep* in Turkish. Even the word *father* is *babas* in Greek and *baba* in Turkish.

Similarities are not limited only in language; Greek and Turkish cuisines also have common dishes. The names of the dishes are similar, too. *Yoghurt*, *baklava*, *keftethes/köfte*, *tzatziki/cacık* are only a few of the similar traditional food. Last but not least, that Greek and Turkish languages, cultures, and cuisines share many common elements is obvious.



\*Greek *keftethes* (in left) and Turkish *köfte* (in right)

## Columbus' Lands: South America

After the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the “New World” according to the Western people rapidly colonized by mostly Spanish and Portuguese. They imposed their culture on the locals, so Latin American culture emerged. Contrary to the widespread belief, Latin America and South America are not exactly refers the place. Latin America is a cultural region and refers to Romance-languages-speaking countries such as Mexico (Spanish), Brazil (Portuguese), and French Guiana (French). On the other hand, South America, which is a geographical term, refers to the southern part of the Isthmus of Panama or Isthmus of Tehuantepec (according to some authorities). South American nations share many similarities with slight differences culturally.



\*A map of South America

Today, except for three countries (Brazil, Suriname, and French Guiana), the official language of all South American countries is Spanish. Furthermore, Christianity is the most believed faith in that part of the world. According to these facts, foreigners might suggest that all South American cultures are almost the same now that there is a lingual and religious unity in those countries. They may have a point; however, the reality is slightly different.

A survey made by *Cultural Mixology* reveals the insider's view on language, perceptions, influences, regional differences, values, punctuality, and food, in which the uniqueness can be seen. For instance, when Brazilians were asked about how they are perceived, they emphasized internal diversity. More than half of them mention the regional differences were mainly based on education. Argentines, on the other hand, focused on the issues of identity mostly; think that the differences were best seen in the capital, Buenos Aires and all other areas in the ways of speaking, immigrant influence, and economic development.

Tolerance of late arrivals are also differs between countries. To exemplify, 71% of Columbians, 66% of Chileans, and 63% of Brazilians expect a person to arrive to work no more than 10 minutes late. In addition, 43% of Argentines, 83% of Chileans and 36% of Brazilians say that it is acceptable to arrive at least 30 minutes late for a social event. Lastly, societies colonized by the same empire and believe the same faith have differences in many points as a result of these data, which is quite interesting.

## Conclusion

To sum up, geographic closeness does not mean the cultures are exactly the same, but still it causes some interaction through trade, political conflicts etc. Interaction between nations cannot be prevented; it is just a natural event. Considering it as stealing the memory of another nation would be a terrible mistake.

References

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