

Conrad Phillip Kottak

Mirror for Humanity

A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

Second Edition



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A CONCISE INTRODUCTION
TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

Conrad Phillip Kottak

University of Michigan



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MIRROR FOR HUMANITY:

A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

6 7 8 9 0 DOC/DOC 3 2

ISBN 0-07-290171-3

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Supplement coordinator: *Marc Mattson*
Compositor: *Shepherd, Inc.*
Typeface: *10.5/13 Janson*
Printer: *R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kottak, Conrad Phillip.

Mirror for humanity : a concise introduction to cultural anthropology / Conrad Phillip Kottak. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-07-290171-3

I. Ethnology. I. Title.

GN316.K66 1999

306—dc21

98-18645

<http://www.mhhe.com>

Ordinarily we are unaware of the special lens through which we look at life. It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water. Students who had not yet gone beyond the horizon of their own society could not be expected to perceive custom which was the stuff of their own thinking. *Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety.*

(Kluckhohn 1944, p. 16—his emphasis)

Preface

Mirror for Humanity (MFH) is intended to provide a concise, relatively low-cost, introduction to cultural anthropology. The combination of shorter length and lower cost increases the instructor's options for assigning additional reading—case studies, readers, and other supplements—in a semester course. Based on experience with the first edition, MFH also works well in a quarter system, since traditional cultural anthropology texts may be too long for a one-quarter course.

I've tried to keep MFH an up-to-date text. Because anthropology, reflecting the world itself, seems to change at an increasing rate, **the introductory text should not restrict itself to subject matter defined decades ago, ignoring the pervasive changes affecting the peoples, places, and topics traditionally studied by anthropologists.** Included in MFH, for example, are discussions of failed states, including discussions relating the demise of the Soviet Union to issues of ethnicity and nationalism. MFH also examines the growing significance of diversity and multiculturalism in North America, and it includes anthropology's increasingly transnational, multilocal, and longitudinal perspectives.

Still, rapid change notwithstanding, **anthropology has a core.** Even the briefest text must expose anthropology's nature, scope, and roles as a **science**, a **humanities** field, and a **mirror for humanity.** Anthropology is a *science*—a “systematic field of study or body of knowledge that aims, through experiment, observation, and deduction, to produce reliable explanations of phenomena, with reference to the material and physical world” (*Webster's New World Encyclopedia* 1993, p. 937). Clyde Kluckhohn (1944, p. 9) called anthropology “the science of human similarities and differences,” and his statement of the need for such a science still stands: “Anthropology provides a scientific basis for dealing with the crucial dilemma of the world today: how can peoples of different appearance, mutually unintelligible languages, and dissimilar ways of life get along peaceably together?” (Kluckhohn 1944, p. 9). Cultural anthropology has compiled an impressive body of knowledge, which this textbook attempts to encapsulate.

Anthropology is also a *humanities* field. In fact, cultural anthropology may well be the most humanistic of academic fields, because of its fundamental respect for human diversity. Anthropologists listen to, record, and represent voices from a multitude of nations and cultures. We strive to convince our students of the value of local knowledge, of diverse world views and perspectives. Cultural anthropology brings a comparative and nonelitist perspective to forms of creative expression, including art, narratives, music, and dance. Cultural anthropology influences and is influenced by the humanities. For example, adopting an anthropological view of creativity in its social and cultural context, recent approaches in the humanities have paid greater attention to mass and popular

culture and to local creative expressions. Another convergence between anthropology and the humanities is the view of cultural expressions—"unwritten behavior, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual" (Clifford 1988, p. 39)—as patterned texts whose meanings must be deciphered in a particular cultural context. A final link between anthropology and the humanities is the study of ethnographic accounts as ways of representing other cultures and experiences (Clifford 1988; Marcus and Fischer 1986).

Anthropology's final basic role is as a *mirror for humanity*—a term derived from Clyde Kluckhohn's metaphor, expressed in his book *Mirror for Man* (1944), which suggested the title of this text. By looking at other cultures we can see ourselves more clearly:

Ordinarily we are unaware of the special lens through which we look at life. It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water. Students who had not yet gone beyond the horizon of their own society could not be expected to perceive custom which was the stuff of their own thinking. *Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety* (Kluckhohn 1944, p. 16—his emphasis)

This point reminds me of one of my teachers, Margaret Mead. Although Kluckhohn wrote the popular book entitled *Mirror for Man*, anthropologists remember Mead for her unparalleled success in demonstrating anthropology's value and relevance in allowing Americans to reflect on cultural variation and the plasticity of human nature. Mead conveyed the anthropological perspective to a broad public in a way no contemporary anthropologist does. She represented anthropology so effectively because she viewed it as *a humanistic science of unique value in understanding and improving the human condition*. This book is written in the belief that anthropologists should remember and emulate Margaret Mead's example.

No single or monolithic theoretical perspective orients this book. My e-mail, along with reviewers' comments, confirms that instructors with a wide range of views and approaches have been pleased with MFH as a teaching tool. By condensing, reorganizing, rewriting, and updating, I derived the first edition of MFH from my longer McGraw-Hill text, *Cultural Anthropology* (sixth edition). However, this second edition of MFH has been revised independently of *Cultural Anthropology*. Guided by a very thoughtful set of reviews, I have changed the placement of certain chapters. I did this to enhance continuity and to achieve a better fit with the way most instructors seem to teach introductory cultural anthropology (with religion later in the course, for example). The organization is intended to cover core anthropology and the basics, while also illustrating prominent current issues. MFH concludes with four chapters especially

relevant to anthropology's role in today's world: The World System, Industrialism, and Stratification (Chapter 11), Cultural Exchange, Creativity, and Survival (Chapter 12), Development and Innovation (Chapter 13), and Applied Anthropology (Chapter 14).

Some chapters have been shortened, condensed, or combined (e.g., the old chapters on ethnicity and race) to allow treatment of new topics (e.g., "ebonics" and cyberspace in Chapter 4 and modern religions in Chapter 10). There has been reorganization and clarification in Chapter 6, Kinship, Descent, and Marriage. Throughout the book, charts, tables, and statistics have been updated with the most recent figures available for the United States and Canada. Chapter 1 now has more discussion of the other subfields of anthropology in relation to cultural anthropology.

MFH has three important chapters not consistently found in cultural anthropology texts: Ethnicity and Race (Chapter 3), Gender (Chapter 9), and Cultural Exchange, Creativity, and Survival (Chapter 12). These and other chapters explore the nature, role, and preservation of human diversity in the face of globalization. I recognize and try to show how linkages in the modern world system have both enlarged and erased old boundaries and distinctions as described in standard anthropology textbooks. People travel more than ever, but migrants maintain their ties with home, so that they live multilocally. With so many people "in motion," the unit of anthropological study has expanded from the local community to the transnational diaspora.

A sociopolitical paradox of today's world is that both integration and disintegration are increasing. New sections of MFH that address this phenomenon are those entitled "**The Challenge to the State**" in Chapter 8 (Chiefdoms and States) and "**Cyberspace: A New Realm of Communication**" in Chapter 4 (Language and Communication). "The Challenge to the State" focuses on an apparent decline in the power and role of government, as new bases for union and division form throughout the world. One such basis is identity politics, involving shared culture, language, religion, or "race," rather than citizenship in a nation-state. A key feature of the state is its territorial basis, and territory is declining as a basis of identity, with the rise of multilocality and transnationalism.

The new section on cyberspace discusses the role of **advanced information technology** (AIT) in creating both unity and division, in that people are linked in both wider and narrower communication networks. Also discussed are issues of inequality in access to AIT, elitism and gatekeeping, and the relation between cyberspace and social reality.

I am pleased to have been one of the textbook authors chosen to participate in the **Gender in the Curriculum** project of the American Anthropological Association. In that project I was paired with Yolanda Moses (a recent president of the Association), who commented extensively on, and met with me to discuss, the treatment of gender (in writing and in the photo program) in my texts

Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity and Cultural Anthropology. I continue to draw on the lessons I learned: Gender issues are the focus of a separate chapter (Chapter 9) here, but they are also considered throughout the text.

In considering ethnic and national cultural identities, Chapter 3 examines multiculturalism in North America and the revival of ethnic expression and conflict in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Chapter 12 focuses on issues of cultural exchange, creativity, and survival in a global culture driven by flows of people, technology, finance, images, information, and ideology. Indigenous peoples use various strategies to resist attacks on their autonomy, identity, and livelihood. New forms of political mobilization and cultural expression have emerged from the interplay of local, regional, national, and international cultural forces.

Pedagogy: This edition incorporates suggestions made by users of my other texts as well as reviewers of the first edition of MFH. The result, I hope, is a sound, well-organized, interesting, and “user-friendly” introduction to cultural anthropology.

MFH contains several **issues boxes**, intended to give students a chance to consider anthropology’s relevance to today’s multicultural world and to their own lives. Some boxes, such as “Church and State” (in Chapter 10), examine current events or debates. Others are more personal accounts, which add human feeling to the presentation of cultural anthropology’s subject matter. Many boxes illustrate points with examples familiar to students from their enculturation or everyday experience.

A **glossary** defining terms boldfaced in each chapter is found at the end of the book, along with a **bibliography** of references cited.

Available for use with MFH, 2e is the second edition of an **ethnographic case studies** book, *Culture Sketches*, by Holly Peters-Golden. This supplement profiles several of the cultures discussed in MFH. Dr. Peters-Golden has taught introductory anthropology at the University of Michigan, using my textbook, for several years.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to many present and past colleagues at McGraw-Hill. I thank Nancy Blaine, my enthusiastic and helpful anthropology editor, for her ideas and support. I continue to enjoy working with Phil Butcher, McGraw-Hill’s social science publisher.

I thank Beth Cigler for her work as project manager in keeping everything moving on schedule. It’s been a pleasure to work again with Barbara Salz, photo researcher. I also thank Georgia Kornbluth for her copyediting; Crispin Prebys,

designer, Scott Hamilton, production supervisor, and Leslie Kraham, marketing project manager.

I am grateful to the following pre-publication reviewers of MFH, 2e: Diane Everett Barbolla, San Diego Mesa College; William L. Coleman, University of North Carolina—Greensboro; William Leons, University of Toledo; Martin Ottenheimer, Kansas State University; Gerald F. Reid, Sacred Heart University; Eugene E. Ruyle, California State University—Long Beach; Betty A. Smith, Kennesaw State University; and Mark Tromans, Broward Community College. I was delighted by the enthusiasm expressed in their comments, especially by those who have used MFH in their courses. My thanks also to several colleagues, especially Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (University of Wisconsin—Madison), Norman Whitten (University of Illinois—Champaign-Urbana), Karla Valdes (Riverside Community College), and Michael McCrath (South Seattle Community College), for taking the time to e-mail me their helpful comments.

Students, too, regularly share their insights about MFH via E-mail. Particularly helpful comments have come from the College of William and Mary, Illinois Wesleyan University, Queens College (New York City), and Southern Oregon University. Anyone—student or instructor—with access to E-mail can reach me at the following address: **ckottak@umich.edu**.

As usual, my family has offered me understanding, support, and inspiration during the preparation of *Mirror for Humanity*. This book is dedicated to my daughter, Juliet Kottak Mavromatis, who continues our family tradition of exploring human diversity and diagnosing and treating the human condition.

After 30 years of teaching, I have benefitted from the knowledge, help, and advice of so many friends, colleagues, teaching assistants, and students that I can no longer fit their names into a short preface. I hope they know who they are and accept my thanks.

Annually since 1968 I've taught Anthropology 101 (Introduction to Anthropology) to classes of 350–600 students, with the help of 5–12 teaching assistants each time. Feedback from students and teaching assistants keeps me up to date on the interests, needs, and views of the people for whom MFH is written. I continue to believe that effective textbooks are based in enthusiasm and in practice—in the enjoyment of teaching. I hope that this product of my experience will continue to be helpful to others.

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About the Author

Conrad Phillip Kottak (A.B. Columbia College 1963; Ph.D. Columbia University 1966) is Professor and Chair of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, where he has taught since 1968. In 1991 he was honored for his teaching by the University and the state of Michigan. In 1992 he received an excellence in teaching award from the College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts of the University of Michigan.

Professor Kottak has done field work in cultural anthropology in Brazil (since 1962), Madagascar (since 1966), and the United States. His general interests are in the processes by which local cultures are incorporated, and resist incorporation, into larger systems. This interest links his earlier work on ecology and state formation in Africa and Madagascar to his more recent research on global change, national and international culture, and the mass media.

The second edition of Kottak's case study *Assault on Paradise: Social Change in a Brazilian Village*, based on his field work in Arembépe, Bahia, Brazil, since 1962, was published in 1992 by McGraw-Hill. (A third edition will be published soon.) In a project during the 1980s, collaborating with Brazilian and North American researchers, Kottak blended ethnography and survey research in studying "Television's Behavioral Effects in Brazil." That research is the basis of Kottak's book *Prime-Time Society: An Anthropological Analysis of Television and Culture* (Wadsworth 1990—a comparative study of the nature and impact of television in Brazil and the United States).

Kottak's other books include *The Past in the Present: History, Ecology and Cultural Variation in Highland Madagascar* (1980), *Researching American Culture: A Guide for Student Anthropologists* (1982) (both University of Michigan Press) and *Madagascar: Society and History* (1986) (Carolina Academic Press). Eighth editions of Kottak's texts *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity* and *Cultural Anthropology* are planned for publication by McGraw-Hill in 1999.

Conrad Kottak's articles have appeared in academic journals including *American Anthropologist*, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *American Ethnologist*, *Ethnology*, *Human Organization*, and *Luso-Brazilian Review*. He has also written for more popular journals, including *Transaction/SOCIETY*, *Natural History*, *Psychology Today*, and *General Anthropology*.

In current and recent research projects, Kottak and his colleagues have investigated the emergence of ecological awareness in Brazil, the social context of deforestation in Madagascar, and popular participation in economic development planning in northeastern Brazil.

Conrad Kottak appreciates and responds to comments about his textbook from professors and students. He is readily reached by E-mail at the following Internet address: ckottak@umich.edu

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