
Classifying Cultures and Identifying Cultural Identities by Relations in Groups: Drawing from Models in Psychology and Ecology

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ABSTRACT

This piece offers a preliminary test of approaches adapted from psychology and ecology for use in classifying and explaining choices of cultural strategies and identities. The paper adds two methodological dimensions to the traditional ethnographic and comparative approaches used in social anthropology: comparisons based on relations of a large number of cultures to each other, and relative changes of cultures over long time frames. The approach, used in psychology in the study of group dynamics and role theory for individuals in groups, seems promising when applied to cultures, using analogous patterns of cultural identity formation as part of a larger relational dynamic of cultures within groups or clusters of multiple cultures. Though this is just a first step, there may be a set of constant relational patterns that consistently reasserts itself and forces individual cultures into particular roles relative to other cultures. This could contribute to reconstruction of a predictive social and cultural anthropology that classifies and explains cultures based on geographic adaptation, technological sophistication, and position and roles relative to several other cultures at once and over time.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, social and cultural anthropologists have increasingly viewed identity and culture as processes of ‘social construction’ that are results of free choice rather than causally de-

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terminated and predictable according to underlying patterns. ‘Deep description’ has replaced scientific explanations, including the use of Darwinian evolutionary models. The discipline has come to be defined by its methodology of isolated, ethnographic case studies, in some ways akin to journalism, rather than by its research questions that would adapt methodologies to the search for answers.

The current approach in the discipline may be self-reinforcing. Defining the discipline by a specific methodology based on individual case studies may reinforce the belief that all cases are unique or subject to random events and cannot be described by common principles. If, in fact, causality could be revealed by looking at several cultures together, over longer time frames, and with additional variables, the agreement not to do so would prevent such a discovery. The current approach to individual ethnography in social and cultural anthropology and the way that anthropologists specialize their knowledge by ‘tribe’ or sub-field, amounts to a self-imposed, almost ‘religious’, methodological constraint that may be predisposing certain conclusions about how cultural identities form and change.

As one of a small group of anthropologists whose work has focused not on specific cultures but on minority rights, processes of empires, sustainability and ‘development’, my perspective has largely been one that is relational, looks at multiple groups of cultures, in a variety of settings, and over long periods of history in which claims to identity reflect relative transformations and adaptations of different roles and geographies. This ‘accidental’ exposure to other methodologies with fewer constraints has raised the question that is the basis of this article and a *General Hypothesis to be Tested: Would a different methodological framework begin to reveal additional patterns that could explain (and predict) cultural identities?*

In field work in different regions, I have noted common patterns of cultural relations and identity based on hierarchical positioning driven by power dynamics. The definitions of identity fit patterns of relations to ‘the other’ in what seem to be a set pattern of group dynamics. Rather than independent choices, these seem to reflect determined and recurring predictable patterns. For example:

– Next to two historic empires – those of Russia and the Han Chinese – neighbors have developed smaller ‘copies’ of those

empires and have even maintained names that suggest their position relative to the larger systems. 'Ukraine' is translated as 'at the border' and 'Belorus' as 'White Russia' (actually, 'White "Red (heads)"') while 'Viet Nam' of the Kinh people comes from the country of the 'Nan Yue' or 'Southern "Barbarians"' who were also considered edge peoples to the south of China, the 'Central Kingdom'.

– Cultures under colonial rule define their belief in rights and equity in ways that are opposite to the positions they take towards other groups after their independence as states. In several decades since reaffirming statehood lost after 2,000 years, for example, Israeli Jews have gone from a stateless minority affirming certain concepts of minority rights to a majority nationality acting within its borders in a patterned way towards its own minorities.

These patterns of cultural identity based on group dynamics are complementary to existing classification schemes of anthropology that look at how cultures adapt and define themselves in relation to their environments and partly to each other on simple dimensions (political or economic production roles) over certain time frames (e.g., contemporary 'globalization' processes). Group dynamics adds another dimension and, it seems, an array of roles, that can be used both to classify and possibly to predict additional elements of a culture. When various groups compete with each other and differentiate themselves in particular niches and as different systems go through what may be predictable cycles of rise and fall (natural processes of group formation and disintegration), it appears that cultures emerge and define their identities to fit these positional roles.

This piece serves as a preliminary attempt to test and reconstruct a predictive social and cultural anthropology by drawing on methodological approaches of psychology and considering those of other disciplines. Though some other disciplines can be viewed in parallel to anthropology, current methodological constraints in anthropology seem to have prevented testing models from those disciplines. Psychology, for example, studies behavior at the level of the individual rather than that of the cultural system, yet, it applies both a method of 'case study' of individual behavior as well as study of the relational behavior of individuals: filling certain roles as part of a group, as part of a system of group dynamics, as groups

form, disintegrate and then form again. The same approach, applied to cultures, suggests that there also may be a way to understand cultures by looking at the different 'roles' they play in an overall system dynamics in a group, with particular roles in relation to that of other cultures.

This article is presented in a scientific format but does not offer a complete experiment. It is an attempt to open up a discussion on relaxing current methodological constraints and rigidities in models, explanations, and presentations in the discipline.

BACKGROUND

Though social and cultural anthropology today largely avoids comparative methods and search for causal explanations for cultural adaptations and change, there are still a number of existing and implicit descriptive models with attached methodologies in the field. There are, arguably, two tracks of explanations that could be labeled as follows:

1) *stratification approaches to distinguishing and describing cultures* based on evolutionary, functional adaptations across an array of geography and technological development or based on political power relations; and

2) *descriptions or typologies using internal characteristics or overall 'ethos'* to try to describe certain internal characteristics of cultures relative to each other or to different characterization labels.

The approaches presented below should be recognizable to most anthropologists and sociologists. Space limitations prevent a longer discussion. They are presented here just to demonstrate how changing certain parameters of current methodologies and descriptions (looking at more cultures at once and taking a more long-term, more dynamic and less static approach) opens up the possibility of additional models and descriptions (to be tested in this article).

1) Stratification Approaches to Describing Cultures

Table 1 (below) lists in rows the different types of 'stratification' explanations (differentiation) of cultures that are familiar to most anthropologists and divides these approaches, with the use of two columns, as to whether they are 'static' explanations or 'dynamic' (incorporating for the possibility of transformative change

out of the current categories, over time). The list starts with the most basic approach (classifying cultures by their geographic niches where they differentiated themselves from other human groups; that is, how cultures mapped themselves onto the geography) and then includes factors of technological differentiation, political stratification in state systems (relative political power), politico-economic (economic role) and then ideological differentiation.

In a sense, this list replicates the story that is told about cultural differentiation as cultures evolved technology, formed into states and complex societies (with different political power and economic niches) and formed different blocs competing with each other, with each bloc bearing a different ideological label (a modern example would be the euphemisms 'socialist' and 'post-socialist' that some anthropologists currently use to differentiate between cultural hegemony of the USA and Western Europe and that of Russia). While this is partly a story of evolutionary adaptation, the reason it is described here as 'static' is because each culture is viewed as fitting into the array in a way that became fixed. If the models were 'dynamic', the arrays would account for a predictable long-term pattern of flux beyond 'one period' of transition and adaptation, suggesting that cultures could shift (and exchange) their classifications as part of an overall systemic change. In 'one period' models, competition and contact result in the hierarchy and integrated systems that begin to force specialization and roles. In these 'one period' models, change is viewed as differentiating cultures in systems of increasing complexity or of adaptive radiation to particular environments, subject to being disrupted by chance events or 'free choice'. No current models in social and cultural anthropology would suggest that a lowland culture with high political power and advanced technology would switch to becoming a highland culture with little relative power and less technology and still be viewed as the same culture in a predictable process. In other words, no dynamic model exists to predict how cultures would move to entirely different classifications in future periods, in ways that might look at groups of cultures together (the hypothesis tested in this article and presented in the final row of the table).

Table 1

Stratification Approaches in the Modeling of Cultural Relations: Theories and Authors by Factors of Stratification

<i>Factors (Driving Forces) of Stratification</i>	<i>Static Model</i>	<i>Dynamic Model</i>
<i>Geographic Segmentation</i>	Evolutionary niche strategies (Sahlins 1960; Whitten 1969; Leach 1954)	?
<i>Technological Stratification</i>	Hunting-Agriculture-Industrial Revolutions, State Formation, etc. (Service 1975; Toffler 1980; Fernandez-Arnesto 2000)	Not applicable other than in convergence, diffusion and assimilation models. Though linear evolutionary models are discarded, development theory supposes uni-directional adaptation of technology
<i>Political Stratification</i>	Dependency Theory and Globalization (Frank <i>et al.</i> 1972; Wallerstein 1979) with 'Client states' under hegemony (Chomsky and Herman 1979) New World Order and 'Zornia' 'shelter zone' holdouts (Scott 2009)	Individual ethnographies of adapting cultures like the Phu Noi of Lao (Bouté 2011)
<i>Political Economic Stratification (internal colonialism)</i>	Socio-economic niches and castes (Shibutani and Kwan 1965)	?
<i>Ideological Groupings and Bi-Polar Identities</i>	– 'Socialist and post-socialist' (Soyuz Anthropology group); – 'Democratic', 'Authoritarian' and other Cultures (Bell 1960; and others) – Religious 'clash of civilizations' or 'East versus West' (Huntington 1996)	Not applicable
<i>Social Roles</i>	[This article] Some preliminary models of systems interaction (Evans-Pritchard 1940)	[This article]

Anthropology does implicitly recognize systematization of cultures in groups and niches taken by different cultures (Shibutani and Kwan 1965) and has partly labeled some categories, though just in an *ad hoc* way. Enslaved cultures are not independent of the larger systems in which they are a part. Urban groups and cultures do fill certain roles in larger systems – Roma and Jewish merchants in Europe, for example. There are some descriptions of the processes of cultures fitting into these niches.

Stratification implies that cultures do define themselves relative to each other ('the other') but that the differentiation is along a specific variable (geography) or spectrum (of relative power) or fitting a specific economic productive need (an economic niche) and that clustered groups may form (described by an ideology or religion that is a marker for their relationship).

Table 2 shows how one of these stratification approaches – the political stratification idea in anthropology largely based on the political-economy model of dependency theory – works.

Table 2

**Role Stratification using the Political Economy Model
of Dependency Theory**

<i>Dependency Model and Corollaries</i>	<i>Examples (Cold War Era)</i>
'Center'/ First World	'USA' (state or culture?); European nation-states
'Client State'/First and Second World	Israel, Japan, Thailand
Competitor/ Second World	Russia, Eastern bloc nation-states
Colonial Periphery/Industrializing and Internal Colonial/Third World	Rest of Soviet Union, Latin American nation-states
Periphery/ Fourth World	Rest of world, stateless peoples

We can label cultures (or nation-states) using the factor of stratification, but this is very different from identifying defined 'roles' that imply the existence of a full set of cultural attributes that could describe a culture fitting into the categories. In other words, there is no theory yet that looks at large numbers of cultures over large time frames to see if there are common identifiable niches and to describe the processes of how they are filled. It would seem to be beyond the constraints of current methodologies.

2) Typologies and Characteristic Approaches to Cultural Classification and Description

If social and cultural anthropology were being conducted as a science, much of the focus would also be on defining specific cultural characteristics and linking them with each other and certain variables and defining cultural types for use in comparisons. Typology of cultures is the basis of science of prediction. If we can distinguish and classify, then we can create links to variables and predict behavior. Social anthropology has partly done this and continues to do it today, but many of these approaches are *ad hoc* and have yet to meet the requirements of predictive social science. In some ways, the stratification approach above also created some of these typologies that label cultures on the basis of their technology, their geographic environments and sometimes by their economic roles.

One can find many types of classifications in anthropology and related social sciences including those that label cultures by how they cluster together (by religion, ideology, common enemies, or values). Many of these have been exposed as nonsense like 'East' versus 'West' (Said 1978). Some are like trying to put friends or relatives into categories or psychological profiling for globalization business programs with things like 'task-oriented', 'people-oriented', 'highly organized planner' (Lewis 2006). Arnold Toynbee classified civilizations in ways that are long discarded (Toynbee 1934–1939). Others have tried to define cultures by their 'values' but without real clarity or explanation of where they come from (Hofstede 1984).

Political scientists label cultures today as 'democratic' and 'non-democratic' and many other typologies ('authoritarian', 'technocratic', and 'post-industrial') that largely serve for name-calling and often do not fit. Decades ago, one eminent sociologist called them 'theories in search of reality' (Bell 1969). They continue today in labeling 'enemies' into clusters (Huntington 1996). One might say that anthropologists are continuing unidimensional, bipolar, Cold War labeling by using euphemisms of 'socialist', 'post-socialist', and 'capitalist' today, without any real scientific modeling of what really amounts to cultural imperialism influence processes. These labels lack the real content essential in a determinative sense of scientific explanation. Similarly, some scholars still use the labels of 'indigenous' or 'tribal' though these labels also break down under scrutiny.

Rather than challenge and push further, we have retreated. There has been some systematization and classification as well as static comparisons using the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF; URL: www.yale.edu/hraf) but anthropologists seem to have given up on using them for scientific comparisons, categorizations or any predictive modeling.

DISCUSSION: PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO LOOK AT CLUSTERS AND MISSING APPROACHES

Beyond the approaches above, there have been some attempts to look at cultures in groups and to describe their interactions. Early anthropologists looked at formalized relations of cultures in groups such as the 'Kula ring' exchanges among the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1920) and the interactions among nomadic and sedentary African cultures (Evans-Pritchard 1940). The commonality of these approaches is that they never identified role systems in more complex group interactions, or sought to test whether they might exist.

There have also been some attempts to look at longer historical paths of single cultures and to suggest that they might fit roles at different times (Bouté 2011; Lempert n.d.). But these have not fit into a larger theory.

The stratification approaches above and some of the classification attempts have long established bases and have prescriptive and predictive value. Probably they can yield much more if there is a return to scientific explanations, linking specific cultural variables with other kinds of quantitative measures (geography, demographics, technology). At the same time, the ideological approaches seem to violate anthropological tenets and are just politically driven or fads and probably proliferate because there is little use of scientific testing that would discard and replace them.

In general, social anthropology today mostly studies the equivalent of individual 'trees'. There are studies of the whole 'forest' but not of the changing dynamics of 'forests' in general, to use an analogy with ecology. Anthropologists talk of fluidity but lack a theory about fluidity and the factors that influence it, that would explain what is constant and why, and how it can be tested. We may be able to add to previous approaches, deepen them, and offer a dynamism that improves explanations.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC HYPOTHESES

If we changed the methodology, could we find more dynamic and predictive patterns of cultural identity (or, equally importantly, rule them out if we cannot)?

General Hypothesis (in Brief): Would a different methodological framework begin to reveal additional patterns that could explain (and predict) cultural identities? This article tests the hypothesis that there is a set of theories that has yet to be explored because methodological constraints (the number of cultures viewed at once and the time periods over which they are studied) have not yet supported looking at cultures in terms of both comparative positions in groups and over the long term. It is possible that other constraints could also be relaxed for other tests. This can partly be tested through examination of three specific hypotheses that are part of the models that are generated when a different methodological framework is applied:

Specific Hypothesis 1. A Relational Model, Static: Cultures Fit Different Roles within Groups.

– If we search for a model whereby cultures fit roles within groups, analogous to individual roles in groups, posit a set of categories for a group of cultures (such as might be found in psychology or ecology) and then look at different geographic areas where cultures interact in groups, can we find that different cultures fit the same, recurring, categories in different places? Do cultures differentiate their identities in order to fit into relative roles that can be seen in a group of cultures at a static point in time?

Specific Hypothesis 2. A Dynamic Model, Comparative, for a Sample of Cultures in a Geographic Area: Over Time, Cultures Shift Their Relative Positions and Identities Consistent with the Dynamics of the Group.

– If there are set cultural roles, do cultures pattern their identities and strategies in a pre-determined way, to fit the role they are forced to play as their relative status shifts? Though cultures may originally adapt to the environment and may evolve technology, does the change in relative status, as a result of competition or random natural factors, require adaptation to particular roles? Do cultures move fluidly through roles and change relative position (such that the idea of ‘indigenous’ or ‘hill tribe’ or ‘primitive’ simply characterizes a projection of the static present position on to the past?); and

Specific Hypothesis 3. A Dynamic Model of One Culture: Over Time, Individual Cultures can ‘Cycle’ Their Identities through Fixed Group Roles.

– If large numbers of cultures show that they have adapted to fit specific roles, is it also true that single cultures can also be moved into a variety of different roles such that cultures ‘become’ each other by changing roles as one might change clothing?

METHODOLOGY

We can test the general hypothesis above with a bit of a thought experiment and then flesh out the answer through testing the sub-hypotheses with some data. To test the general hypothesis, we can create a chart (Table 3) that links methodology to different kinds of theoretical models about cultures. We can start with current methodology and the approaches that we find (above) and then free the methodology to see what new models there might be. Then we test one of the new frameworks/models with some actual data to see whether it might bear fruit.

Above, we looked at the types of anthropological explanations for cultural differentiation, that exist now and then tied them to certain methodological approaches. In Table 3, we reverse this and look at the kinds of patterns and hypotheses we might be able to test if we removed the constraints of the methodology. Table 3 suggests how the methodologies influence the theories that can be tested and the types of models and explanations that can be generated if we release those constraints. Going down the rows, we free up the methodologies to become more dynamic (increasing the number of periods for which we model cultures). Going across the columns, we increase the number of cultures that we examine at once.

Table 3

The Constraints of Anthropological Methodology and Use of New Approaches

<i>Time Dimension of Study</i>	<i>Number of Cases Used</i>		
	<i>Case Study of single case</i>	<i>Comparative individual cases (testing of variables)</i>	<i>Comparative Position in Groups (taxonomies)</i>
1	2	3	4
<i>Static</i>	Traditional Ethnography (<i>sui generis</i> description)	Classification schemes and comparative features of types; Clustering	Segmentation on Landscape or Taxonomy by Economic or Technical Level or by ideologies

1	2	3	4
<i>Dynamic (short term)</i>	Cultural Transition Processes	Comparative adaptation of types; Evolution	Processes of Globalization, Colonialism, Diffusion, Convergence
<i>Dynamic (long term)</i>	Historic Ethnography and Archaeology	Comparative rise and collapse of types	Role Theory and Fluid Adaptation to Changing Roles Over Time, including imperial rise and collapse [This article]

Though this is not a perfect chart, we can see how the most popular approach today, of single ethnography in a static time frame or over a short period of change, is very different from the types of models that can be imagined by looking at comparisons and by looking at comparisons over very long time frames (the hypothesis that cultural identity fluidly moves to fit fixed cultural roles based on group relations).

Today, most social and cultural anthropologists study individual cases, usually in a fixed time frame. Sometimes we, as social and cultural anthropologists, make comparisons. Sometimes we look at individual cases over time. There may be more approaches than those presented in this table and the table categories are not exact. Yet, one can see from the table how restrictions on just one of these dimensions may also have affected what anthropology is able to do. It looks like the hypothesis may be right. The methodology in anthropology today may be driving the theory in a way that reverses what a discipline is supposed to be about (research questions and theories driving the methodology rather than the methodology restricting the theory and the types of questions and answers). To test that, we need to look at the model that a different methodological approach would suggest.

Psychology and sociology tells us that using a dynamic approach and looking at individuals in roles in groups does have explanatory power. There are strong theories and robust experimental data in those disciplines about how actions, roles and self definitions change almost instinctively within the context of groups. Two classic psychology experiments – Zimbardo's 'prison experiment' that alternates the role of subjects as prisoners and guards (Zim-

bardo 1972) and Milgram's experiments on 'obedience to authority' that alternates roles of leaders and followers (Milgram 1974) – suggest that behaviors are 'plastic' and that individuals respond to authority and social psychological pressures that trigger role behaviors largely outside of rational control. If individual 'choice' is often just a primal response to circumstance to fit a role, it would be logical to think that cultural choices might be instinctively determined in similar ways. Sociological studies of age cohorts, life cycle and behaviors in institutions are described in the adage (or theorem): 'Where you sit [in a group positional role] is where you stand [*i.e.*, determines what you think and how you will act]'

If these are fixed principles of social psychology (social behavior of individuals in groups), might there also be similar, fixed principles of 'social culturology' (social behavior of cultures in groups)?

DATA AND RESULTS: TESTING SAMPLES OF CULTURES OVER LONG TIME FRAMES

Is there enough preliminary data to suggest that it would be worth removing the methodological strait jacketing of anthropology to use other frameworks and test other models? We can briefly test the three different sub-hypotheses as follows.

Specific Hypothesis 1. A Relational Model, Static: Cultures Fit Different Roles within Groups

– The definition of roles in groups is only partially developed in social psychology. It is mostly described in terms of strategies and niches in ecology. It is even fuzzier in sociology. Nevertheless, we can still test it here by adapting models from ecology and psychology (choosing those that are most promising). The idea is that there are recurring, static categories across different geographic areas and time periods; not just stratification but clear roles with specific behaviors (cultural strategies).

The idea of 'groups' and 'roles' in groups has a long history in social psychology (Wells 1980). Sociologists originally offered theories of roles with some of the early attempts describing professional economic roles for divisions of labor, including the stereotypes of male and female labor in 'gender roles' (Parsons 1951; Mead 1934; Bales and Slater 1955).

Other social sciences and sciences have also developed relational models that have partly been tested in anthropology – dependency theory models from political economy – that partly work both for internal colonization and ethnic relations (within borders of 'states') and external colonization. But, as shown above in Table 2,

this is only a four (or five) feature stratification model and does not really include roles such as ‘copy cats’ or neutral intermediaries.

In Table 4, we can test a number of roles that come out of ecology, looking to see if cultures group themselves in an analogous way to relational niches in environmental study of ecosystems. The table lists seven different strategies found in ecosystems that supplement the spectrum of predator-prey in a food chain. It is possible that cultures also use parallel strategies to these. Some of the cultural roles are suggested in the second column but no examples are provided here. Further elaboration and testing of this approach is left to the reader.

Table 4

**Testing Role Stratification
Using Ecological Concepts of Niches**

<i>Environmental Niches: Eco-System Roles</i>	<i>Cultural Niches: Cultural Strategies in a Group</i>
Predator	Imperial center
Parasite	Ancestral center or religious center, Border culture?
Symbiotic	Neutral banking culture
Free rider	Neighboring developed culture
Camouflage/Mimic	?
Prey (Small Predator)	Periphery with resources
Prey/Vegetable Mass	?

The most fruitful scheme for testing (see Table 5) seems to be from psychology since psychology and anthropology may be the two basic social sciences that are parallel to each other but at different levels of complexity (with psychology looking at the individual and the individual human in groups, and anthropology looking at human groups and then human groups in groups). Though psychology has developed the idea of roles in groups, there is still some debate over the number and definitions of roles.

Table 5
Testing Psychology of Roles Approach: Analogy to Role Theory in Group Behavior

Psychology: Role Theory in Groups (Ethology Adaptations)	Possible Analogy of Cul- tures/Nations in Groups	Possible Analogy of Sub-Cultu-res in Groups (Internal)	Quick Test of Model: Possible Examples				
			China/Chines e and Asia	U.S., Internal and External	Russia, Inter- nal and Ex- ternal	Ecuador (1980s)	Lao
1 Leader (α Male; "Queen Bee")	2 Central Em- pire	3 Leading Ethnic Group	4 Han Chinese	5 "WASP" (White An- glo Saxon Protestant)	6 Russia	7 Spanish Ecuadori- ans	8 Lao
Patriarch/ Matriarch/ Senior/Elder ("Silver Back")/ Priest/ Priestess	Previous Empire or Religious Center	[May need to be external]	India?	British, Greeks (Athens), Italians (Rome)	Mongols/ Tatars? Greeks /Bulgarians (Orthodox)? Rome? France?	Spain	Bhutan, Sri Lanka, India
"Mind Guard"/Bull y/"Hatchet Man" (Mili- tary Enforcer or Ideologi- cal/Religious Leader)			North Ko- rea?, Khmer (Khmer Rouge)	Italian- Americans	Croatia?, Bulgaria?	Mestizo Christians	Phu Noy (internal; in northern Lao); Chinese, Viet- namese and Thai ("exter- nal")

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Challenger	Neighboring enemy, similar culture	Internal Minority Competitor	Japan, India, Mongolia (historic), Central Asia Muslim	(Continually changing)	China, Germany, Turkey	Peruvian (external); Altiplano (Highland) Mestizos (Mixed); Coastal Mestizos	H'mong (internal); Siam, Burma (external)
Rank and file, followers (β)	Copy-cat culture/Tributary	Internal Assimilated Minorities	Viet Nam	German-American, French-American, Irish-American, Italian-American	Ukraine ("On the Border/Edge"), Belarus ("White Russia"/"White Red Heads")	Incan/Andean Otavalo, Salamanca (market oriented Andean)	Lao Phuan, Khmu (midlands) ("Lao Thoen")
Lower level exploited (χ)	"Tribal Peoples" in outer peripheral areas	"Tribal Peoples" in internal peripheral areas	Black Tai; Muang	African-American; Latin-American; Native American	Buryats, Yakuts, other Siberians	Limon coastal blacks; Amazon Shuar and others	Animist Tai and other minorities, in mountains ("Lao Sung")

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Conciliator-intermediary			Singapore?	Swedes and Swedish-American, Irish-American, Canadian, Dutch-American; Swiss	Lithuania?, Czechs?	Costa Rica?, Venezuela?	Phou Tai? (internal); Khmer? (external)
Clown-Jester/Innovator/Iconoclast/Magician	Free trade zone or arbiters; Border cultures;	Internal liminal groups	Lao, Singapore, Hong Kong, H'mong	Jews, Asian-American	Odessa (Black Sea), Roma, Jews, Poles and other Eastern European	Guayaquil Port foreign migrants?	Vietnamese and Chinese traders?
Scapegoat	Externally persecuted weak group	Internally persecuted weak group	Tibet, Mongols	Muslims	Chechens/Caucasians, Muslims	Columbians?, Peruvians?	Siamese

Table 5 tests the roles found in psychology, listed by rows in the left column and then renamed in ways appropriate to relations of cultures as nation-states relating to each other (second column) and within nation-states or empires (third column). The roles are a compilation as described in psychological literature (Janis 1972; Alderfer 1990; Benne and Sheats 1948) as well as in ethology that looks for these roles in primate groups (Van der Waal 1982) and other species (Lorenz 1982). Some of the original lists were quite wide ranging, such as the 26 categories used by Benne and Sheats for various actions of individuals in groups, such as 'information giving', 'opinion seeking' and 'orienting'. But, others are more clearly consistent and fit Parsons' search for 'socio-emotional' and task roles such as 'a harmonizer' or 'a blocker'. 'Authority and leadership' roles such as 'a priest' or 'a magician' are also clear. The most consistent role categories are listed in the left hand column. Drawing from my career experience, I have tested five geographic categories in the remaining columns, looking both at the external relations of cultures as nation-states and at internal relations. It was possible to complete the table in all of the cases.

This is, of course, very preliminary. The 'fit' may be partly contrived and the roles may be dependent on other variables not identified here. This is just a test to see if such categorization might be a way to look at cultures. We would need better data sets, more defined classifications and a standardized procedure to establish this as a workable explanatory model.

Specific Hypothesis 2. Dynamic Model, Comparative, for a Sample of Cultures in a Geographic Area: Over Time, Cultures Shift Their Relative Positions and Identities Consistent with the Dynamics of the Group

– To test whether cultures fit relative roles that switch in defined ways over long time periods (after their emergence in specific geographic niches and once they have become part of groups of cultures), we can look at a sample of the world's 6,000 cultures (as roughly defined by language). Viet Nam provides such a microcosm of cultural diversity with some 54 cultures (as defined by the Vietnamese government, slightly different from foreign linguistic classifications) or nearly a one per cent sample of the world's cultures. The area has a diverse geography and different language groups.

Most classifications of the Vietnamese ethnic groups both by government and by foreign anthropologists have assumed that the Vietnamese Kinh are the country's one 'civilized' group and that the other groups are small, forest-dwelling populations with limited signs of development and a mostly static history as 'tribal' peoples, with only a few exceptions.

To test the specific hypothesis of a dynamic model of shifting cultural positions, we need to identify a change of an actual position of cultures within cultural systems. To do that, we can identify the surviving cultures and examine their histories to see how their positions may have changed. By definition, if we identify culture by language as the marker, we know that cultures develop through geographic isolation and adaptation to geography. The idea often persists that cultures in niches today that are not dominant in a group of cultures are the original 'indigenous' cultures adapted to that environment and have always played this role. We know that few human cultures have been isolated throughout recorded history but we rarely examine all of the history of all of the cultures existing in a group to examine the long-term dynamics. Here, we can identify the percentage of such cultures that have been in contact with others that have experienced a change in roles, to see how pervasive this idea of 'relative role' and 'role adaptation' is as an explanatory factor. We know that conquered or collapsed imperial cultures that are forced out of their environments will need to readapt to their new environments. How pervasive is this phenomenon? It seems that it is pervasive enough to support the hypothesis.

The question posed here is which groups developed not just control over their own environments but social organization and hierarchy with rule over others or large trade relations, caste or hierarchical groups and not just egalitarian exchange relations (which raise a separate question about roles) but then have had to switch that role to one that today seems to be 'tribal'. If fitting a cultural 'role' is a dominant factor in cultural adaptation, then we need to consider not just geography and not just contemporary hierarchies to explain how a particular culture developed. We need to look at the overall dynamic of shifting roles of groups of cultures over long time periods. We can study large numbers of groups defined as 'tribal' who actually seemed to be only victims of historical circumstances who have lost their lands and whose positions

actually reversed and could reverse again and calculate the number to see if it is significant enough to suggest that the hypothesis might be correct.

Anthropologists, along with others, have generally seen the Han Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer and Siamese as constant dominant groups with most other cultures on the periphery/margins dating back to the Chinese classifications of Yunnanese peoples as 'Bai Yue' or 100 barbarian tribes. In fact, 'Thai', 'Vietnamese', and 'Khmer' identities have also been in flux. Anthropologists have used words like 'indigenous', 'hill tribe', 'montagnard', or 'tribal' ('shifting cultivation or foraging' but used for unassimilated peoples retaining their language and other parts of their culture) to suggest that almost all of the cultures here are stateless peoples using primitive technology in a specific environmental niche. This is the impression that emerges if the view is from a limited time frame.

A different pattern emerges if we change the time frame for which there is not only good written record but also preservation of history on the landscape along with the oral traditions about those structures. In Viet Nam, it is possible in field work to find the temples of defeated royalty who were transported and enslaved even several hundred years later.

Even from using just anthropological sources (Kunstadter 1967; Schlesinger 1997–1998; McKinnon and Michaud 2000; Labar *et al.* 1964; Cultural Survival 1987) and supplementing them with field work (Lempert n.d.) it is possible to challenge the standard conclusions offered today by anthropologists.

Table 6 summarizes the data for this sample. (More of the raw data is presented in the Appendix.) The data is not precise. The idea of a 'kingdom' or 'empire' is different over time. The convention used here is whether cultures were dominant over other groups such that their development and stratification were once more complex than they are today as a result of a loss of power and status.

The data suggests that some 52 per cent of cultures, most of which are labeled today as 'tribal' have had their status reversed and are now identified in a reversed role with identities consistent with that new role.

Table 6

Classification of Current Minority Cultures (Vietnamese Identified Language Groups) within the Borders of Viet Nam by their History of Dominating Other Cultures

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Cultures Shifting Position from Dominant to Minority	27 (Detail Below)	52 %
<i>Cultures with Nation States that are Conquered Empires or Fleeing imperial Royalty on Vietnamese soil</i>	3 (<i>Lao/Lan Xang; Khmer; Minh Huong Chinese</i>)	6 %
<i>Stateless People of former conquered nearby empires</i>	3 (<i>H'mong; M'nong; Tai Den, possibly other Tai</i>) + 3 (<i>Lo Lo/Yi, Le Hu, Ha Nhi</i>)	12 %
<i>Conquered Kingdoms on Vietnamese soil</i>	7 (<i>Cham, Dai Nung, Tai Trang, Tai Lu, Khmu, Muong, Tho/Lao Phuan</i>)	13 %
<i>Conquered Chieftaincies or Kingdoms? (Ancient or small)</i>	9 (<i>Sa Pho, Ma, Cho-Ro, X'tieng, Brau, Xinh Mun, O Du, Khang, Ba Na</i>)	17 %
<i>Possible Historic Kingdoms</i>	2 (<i>Yao, 'Thai'</i>)	4 %
Small groups, historic kingdoms not found in this research	26	48 %
Total (not counting Kinh)	53	100 %

In fact, by these estimates, half of the ethnic groups in the sample may have been advanced peoples with their own kingdoms-states, leaving monuments and histories that are badly preserved or reported, largely because these states were victims of Vietnamese Kinh imperialism or of empires that preceded them whom the Kinh defeated (e.g., Black and White Thai and Cham) or by empires in neighboring countries (Han Chinese, Tai Lao, and Siamese). Their small populations are not a result of weak development or progress, but a consequence of their being conquered and colonized.

Specific Hypothesis 3. Dynamic Model of One Culture: Over Time, Individual Cultures Can Cycle Their Identities through Fixed Group Roles

– For this test, we can take one of the oldest known cultures in the world – that of the ‘Hebrews’ or ‘Jews’ – and examine how its roles and status has shifted historically, as an example of how cultures may survive by their ability to fit roles. Table 7 takes historical-archaeological data (not all confirmed) to see how Jews have fit into four different kinds of slots that imply different roles (Thompson 1992). This chart does not explain assimilation and why some groups disappear and others maintain some identity in their new roles, though this is certainly a corollary question to a theory based on roles.

Table 7

**Shifting Jewish Cultural Roles over Long History
(Selected Eras and Identifying Groups)**

	<i>Landless, Stateless, Outside of Existing States ('Tribal' and 'De-tribalized')</i>	<i>Landed Majority with a State</i>	<i>Landed Minority without a State</i>	<i>Landless Internal Minority</i>
Ancient (before common era)	‘Apiru/Ibri’ (‘Highwaymen’) in Canaan (from 1400 BCE) [Egyptian Exodus, according to Bible]	Judea Kingdom (9 th – 7 th Century BCE)	Babylonian Period (587 BCE)	[Egyptian Slavery, according to Bible]
Historic	(?)	[Khazars?, 7 th – 9 th Century]	Jews in Arab world and Palestine	Diaspora Period (from Roman Conquest), European Traders, Bankers (Middle Ages)
Recent		Modern Israel, since 1948	Shtetl Jews in Jewish Pale; Diaspora Minorities Today	

The Table does not measure whether the cultures specifically reflected the different status positions, but there seems to be historical evidence that they did and that identity was recreated to 'fit' the roles, with strategies also changing. According to archaeologists, the Bible itself may have been an attempt to rewrite the history of the 'Apiri/Ibri' in order to affirm the new dominant kingdom role while eliminating the attributes of the earlier stateless culture.

In a sense, the Jews appear to randomly 'rotate' through various positions at different times, giving up different identity markers (land, language, and specific customs) to fit the roles and then reasserting the label and other markers, later (including resurrecting language). There is no real 'natural progression' and Jews may 'become' the groups they take replace on different lands. Aside from linguistic and genetic identifying markers, which one is the real 'identity' and culture? The answer may be, 'all of them'. The roles simply shift as part of a relative position to other powers. In the case of the Khazar period, it may be that the reverse role creation process occurred; that non-Jews 'became' Jews and then continued in the role of Jews without even historically 'being' Jews.

The process is fluid for individual cultures, potentially requiring/creating multiple roles. This does not answer whether there are also fixed beliefs in one or more cultures that are independent of the roles and that may contain ideas for civilization and human progress, suggesting that there is some aspect of human choice beyond randomness. It does not explain all of the aspects of identity: whether Khazars 'become Jews'; Jews 'become' 'Hebrew speaking' Canaanites or Jews partly 'become' the British after 1948, but the twentieth-century adage, 'We are all Jews now' suggests that the culture itself is analogous to a particular role and that perhaps 'Jews' today are not 'really' Jews as defined by previous roles and strategies.

One can find similar processes in other regions where populations are forced migrated and replace other groups.

CONCLUSION

While this piece does not confirm a specific new theory, it does appear to substantiate the hypothesis that current anthropological methodology is constraining discovery and explanatory theory rather than creating the freedom that is often suggested. This article suggests that the field needs to be based on questions and to have

agreed on the processes for measuring results, not defined by adherence to methodology or use of particular labels.

Results are incomplete and imperfect in this short article on whether and how cultures fit specific roles within certain types of groups of cultures. The data is meant to be indicative and to suggest a new theoretical framework as well as the need for a new methodological approach in anthropology that is not confining rather than to prove a specific theory of cultural roles and identity formation in groups.

The specific relationships, how to classify them, and the processes by which groups form as well as the kinds of groupings is not clear yet. How big are the groups of cultures? When do the groups of cultures form and under what conditions? How many different roles for separate cultures are there? How many can exist? How do we specify whether cultures fit 'roles' and which parts of identities are outside of such roles? These questions are beyond the scope of this article.

This piece is just a preliminary step, similar to the steps taken in other disciplines in looking at individual behavior within groups. However, it seems highly probable that relational dynamics of cultures do exist, that they are fluid, and that we will be able to apply predictive models to look for their formation and to expect cultures to fill specific niches. Cultural roles are fluid and dynamic but that does not mean they are random and free choice; they still seem to follow determined, explainable patterns. It seems that adding the dimension of roles to the static models that describe cultures in terms of geographic adaptation and technology offers additional explanatory power as part of a science of explaining and predicting cultural choices.

If the findings of this article are confirmed by additional work, there are some interesting implications. If niches are the variable to define cultural behaviors, then in many cases individual cultures do not really matter; they are plastic.

Such findings may be as disturbing to many anthropologists as the findings of behavioral psychologists (such as the Zimbardo [1972] and Milgram [1974] experiments and those of leadership and leadership roles and other suggested roles). The psychology experiments suggested that despite intentions, the placing of individuals in certain roles even alters body chemistry (hormonal

changes) that changes behaviors. For those who like to believe that cultures can create themselves through independent, rational choice, without determinist influences that may be biological and difficult to control, this analogy might be disturbing.

For those who already partly accept determinism and biological adaptation explanations, but also believe in specific legal protections for cultural diversity to help 'protect' cultures as they are, and for those who believe that law and systems are part of this goal of human progress and that there is even something definable as human 'progress', the findings are also disturbing. If cultural strategies and beliefs are really so fluid and a natural 'ordering' takes place that is biologically programmed as part of our behaviors as social beings forming groups and seeing our group in relation to the 'other', there may be questions as to whether real social progress or equity is ever (humanly) possible. Groups and their ideologies may simply reposition as a natural fluid process of adaptation that defies any rational and logical attempts to achieve any imagined 'equity' or order. That may be an unwanted conclusion about humanity and it may also explain why such work has been so long to enter the discipline. It may conflict with existing religious or political ideologies that are part of the 'moral model' of the discipline.

Such findings also have implications for 'development' and cultural protection work. If cultures naturally fit roles and if culture is defined by roles (a similar argument to the one that poverty is always 'relative' and structural and 'is always with us') what does it really mean to 'develop' cultures or to 'protect' identity? There are similar implications for convergence theory and diffusion theory that suggest that cultures will converge or adapt to single forms. Technology and homogenization may occur but a theory of roles suggests that there will always be differentiation on those categorical dimensions unless humans also invent an approach to restructuring relationships to trump innate patterns.

Finally, there are implications for relations within anthropology itself. More links that would reunify the study of living cultures (social and cultural anthropology) with the study of extinct and proto-cultures (archaeology) would enrich the explanatory power of both sub-fields through more comparative data and models.

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ANNEX TABLES

These Tables present research and field data on Viet Nam's 54 recognized ethnic groups tracing the history of these groups to specific kingdoms in which they may have been the dominant ethnicity among one or more ethnic groups. The data is just preliminary. Sources are noted in the text (from Lempert, unpublished manuscript).

A. 1. Groups that Currently Have Nation-States

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Former Empire or Kingdom</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Current Status on Vietnamese Soil</i>
Vietnamese Kinh [Viet Nam]	Controversial as to whether the Kinh today are really descended from Hong Bang/Lac Viet or are mostly an amalgamated (Chinese-French, <i>etc.</i>) cultural group with their own culture mostly extinct	–	Dominant Ethnic Group on original soil (Red River Delta) and areas of conquest
Chinese [China]	'Minh Huong' Trading settlements throughout the south, taking Khmer Land	Since 1680	Forced assimilated, largely in cities
Khmer [Cambodia]	Phu Nam/Fu Nan then Chen La – Angkor – Cambodia	History to the seventeenth century	Roughly Half of Phu Nam – Roughly one-fifth of Angkor – Roughly one-fourth of Cambodia is now under Vietnamese Rule since the seventeenth century
Laotian [Laos]	Lan Xang Kingdom	14 th to 18 th century	10 % (?) + under Vietnamese Rule since the fifteenth century

**A. 2. Stateless Peoples from Former Empires
who Fled to Viet Nam**

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Former Empire or Kingdom</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Current Status on Vietnamese Soil</i>
H'Mong/Miao	Central China (according to Mythology)	1,000–3,000 BCE	Refugee Community in mountains with statehood aspirations
Lo Lo (Yi), Le Hu, Ha Nhi	Qiang Empire (speculative)	1,000–3,000 BCE	Refugee Community in mountains
B'Nom/M'nong	Dong Nai – Phu Nam-Oc Eo Empire (Pre-Angkorian Mon-Khmer)	Up to 500 CE	Fled Chen La – Angkor to mountains
Tay Den (?) and possibly other groups like Siamese/Thai [other Tai groups; White and Red Tai]	Da Li – Nan Zhao Empire, Yunnan	Up to the thirteenth century (possibly originally a key part of 'Au Viet' Bronze Drum Culture), then part of the 'Sip Song Chau Tai' (12 Tai Groups)	Refugee Community from Mongols and Chinese Han

A. 3. Conquered Kingdoms on Vietnamese Soil

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Former Empire or Kingdom</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Current Status on Vietnamese Soil</i>
1	2	3	4
<i>Malayo-Polynesian Kingdoms [three below]</i>			
?	Dol-Men Megalith Culture of Dong Nai	Prehistoric kingdom	
Cham	Sa Huynh – Linh Y – Lam Ap – Champa/ Chiem Thanh	200 BCE to the 17 th century	Formerly enslaved by Kinh and fleeing genocide; adopting Islam for protection
Gia Rai	Pleiku Kingdom with Kings of Fire and Water	Known in the 7 th century, perhaps beaten by Khmer ('Chen La') and Cham; some sources say the Gia Rai are really the 'Ma Lai' (Malaysians)	
E-De	M'Tao Chieftainships	Possibly a smaller, weaker kingdom south of the Gia Rai, perhaps beaten by Chen La and Cham	
<i>Thai and Kadai Groups [several, below]</i>			

1	2	3	4
Tay, Nung [possibly also: San Diu, San Chay, Co Lao]	Dai Nung	The 12 th cen- tury	Largely as- similated by both Chinese and Vietnam- ese cultures given domina- tion by both throughout history
Tai Trang (White Tai), Thai	Lac Viet, then Tai Kingdoms (possibly include refugees from Yunnan when Nan Zhao – Da Li fell, possibly the area was also under Nan Zhao – Da Li) [see chart above]	Prehistory to the 13 th to 15 th century, then reasserted	
Tai Lu	Possibly part of Nan Zhao or other Chinese Kingdom, then Lu Kingdom/ Xinh Mun	Sipsong Panna, 11 th to 13 th cen- tury (contin- ing later in ar- eas in Yunnan and Lao)	
Tho [possibly mixed with the Lao Phuan]	Muang Phuan/Xieng Khouang in Lao	15 th – 19 th cen- tury Kingdom similar to Lao kingdoms	
La Ha/ Xa/ Sa Pho	Sa Pho Kingdom [but see possible overlap of name with the Phu La]		
<i>Mon-Khmer Groups in the south that may have been defeated by or partly merged with Phu Nan – Khmer cul- ture [three possibilities]</i>	<i>These pre-date Phu Nan and their actual fate and connection with minorities in the area, to- day, is unclear</i>		

1	2	3	4
Ma	Prehistoric 'Round Citadel' Culture of northern Binh Phuoc and areas across the border in Cambodia	500 to 0 BCE	Possibly these are the pristine local cultures that partly became Phu Nan when merged with Indian influence
Ma, Cho-ro/Ch'ro, or X'ti-eng Pre-history Cultures	Dol-Mon/ Dol-Men Neo-lithic burials of Indonesian style	500 to 0 BCE	Probably defeated by Phu Nan and maybe also the Cham
Brau	Reported as a one of several groups in the Khmer empire/ Chen La who may have had a state	6 th to 9 th century?	Possibly defeated by the Khmer and/or by the Vietnamese after the fall of the Khmer
<i>Mon-Khmer Groups in the northwest [4 below]</i>	<i>Part of the Angkor and Early Khmer Kingdoms?</i>		
Xinh Mun	Xin Mun Kingdom (sources mix reference the Xinh Mun and Lu sites; they are two separate groups but may have allied or competed in the same area)	11 th to 13 th century	Probably defeated by Thai and largely eliminated
Kho Mu/Khmu (and probably the Mang as an offshoot group)	Sa	To 11 th century (Mon-Dvaravati Kingdoms through Lao and Thailand)	Conquered by Thai and dispersed

1	2	3	4
O Du	O Du Kingdom	To 14 th century	Conquered and enslaved by Thai and now nearly extinct
Khang	? – Part of the Kho Mu or Xin Mun?	?	Under control of the Thai, possibly conquered
Ba Na [also Mon-Khmer]	Mada Kingdom (?)	5 th to 7 th century?	Conquered by Cham and pushed to the mountains
Muong	'Au Viet', and possibly rule of Le Loi	Prehistory, partly reasserted in 14 th century	Gradual flight into mountain and hill areas by Chinese, then by Vietnamese Kinh, then assimilation by Kinh

A. 4. Minority Groups Presumed to Never Have Had Kingdoms (information may be incomplete)

Note that groups that are non-agricultural and migratory, until recent assimilation pressures, are presumed to have been pre-Statehood societies (such as the Chit). Others may have been part of complex larger relations of several groups or former kingdoms (a caste or class; traders, *etc.*). Some groups may have been part of a larger kingdom that then developed their own smaller culture in exile.

<i>Linguistic Classification</i>	<i>Ethnic Groups</i>
1	2
Sino-Tibetan Groups (4)	Pa Then, San Diu, Ngai
	Dzao/Yao/Mien has a large Chinese population and migrated south like the H'Mong; they may have had a kingdom in China
1	2
Tibetan-Burmese Groups (3)	Cong, Si La
	Phu La sometimes go by Xa Pho, which is similar to the name of the La Ha of the Kadai group, found in the same area
Mon Khmer Groups (12)	Xo-Dang, Hre, Co-ho, Bru Van Kieu, Co-tu, Gie-Trieng, Ta-oi, Co, Ro-mam [sedentary in highlands]
	Some of the Mon Khmer groups (and related Malayo Polynesian groups) are speculated to have been part of the early Round Earthworks and the early Dol-Mon/Dol-Men monolith cultures: Xtieng, Cho-ro, Ma
	Some sources describe the Ma (Chau Ma) as having a kingdom in Dong Nai (the Chu Nai) and the X'Tieng as having a kingdom further north in Binh Duong/ Binh Phuoc, surviving until 1680
	If the theory that the Linh Y civilization (pre-Cham between Thanh Hoa and Hue) were a separate group and possibly of Mon Khmer origin, is correct, the Co-tu and Bru Van Kieu could repre-

	sent remnants of or related peoples to the Linh Y, given current location
Viet Muong (2)	Chut, Tho [possibly mixing with the Lao Phuan, a Tai group]
Tay-Thai (3)	San Chay
	Bo Y (and related group, Giay, in Viet Nam) has a large population in China, suggesting that it once had a kingdom
Kadai (Tai branch) (3)	La Chi, Co Lao, Pu Peo
Malayo-Polynesian (2)	Ra-glai, Chu-ru