AMERICAN REGIONALISM

A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH TO NATIONAL INTEGRATION

BY

HOWARD W. ODUM

AND

HARRY ESTILL MOORE

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE .............................................. PAGE V

Part I

THE RISE AND INCIDENCE OF AMERICAN REGIONALISM

CHAPTER

I. The Implications and Meanings of Regionalism ........ 3
II. From Sectionalism to Regionalism ....................... 35
III. Natural Regions: Soil, Topography, Climate .......... 52
IV. Natural Regions: River Valley Regions ................. 86
V. Culture Regions: Metropolitan Regionalism ............ 109
VI. Culture Regions: The Rural Nation ..................... 136
VII. Culture Regions: Literary and Aesthetic Regionalism . 168
VIII. Service Regions: Governmental ....................... 188
IX. Service Regions: Non-Governmental .................. 213
X. Tools for Regionalism: States, Subregions, Districts . 237
XI. Tools for Regionalism: Regional Planning ............ 253

Part II

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF REGIONALISM

XII. Exploring the Region: The Geographers ............... 277
XIII. Exploring the Region: The Anthropologists ........ 303
XIV. Exploring the Region: The Ecologists ................. 323
XV. Exploring the Region: The Economists ................. 346
XVI. Exploring the Region: The Political Scientists .... 364
XVII. Exploring the Region: The Sociologists ............ 394
almost indistinguishable from that of the cultural anthropologist on
the part of some of the present scholars. But also implicit in this
evolution of the idea seems to be that of the region as a physical
and social unity, a frame of reference for the study of societal
phenomena.

Chapter XIII

EXPLORING THE REGION: THE
ANTHROPOLOGISTS

The anthropologists' postulate is that man's own activity is
assuming more and more importance as a factor essential to
any explanation of either his social organization or the envi-
ronment in which he enacts his role in the social drama. Confined
to the stage afforded by geographic conditions, he, nevertheless, exer-
cises a wide range of freedom in selecting the properties he will
utilize, and even in arranging the setting of the stage itself. While
this has been recognized, even emphasized, by modern geographers,
especially by the French school and the German cultural geographers,
and while in this country, Hall and Sauer have called attention to
the need of geographers to study culture, and have used emphatic
language in doing so, the anthropologists have developed the idea
further.

Beginning with the study of the customs and tools with which
men have surrounded themselves, the anthropologists have gradually
evolved theories of the regional distribution of man and his ways of
living. In the concept of the culture area, he has reached a position
which he is being asked to share with the geographer, the sociologist,
and with nearly all other social scientists who seek a systematic ex-
planation of man's activities. Approaching from different angles,
many social thinkers are coming to believe that spatial relationships
are a necessary part of such an explanation.

The culture area concept in its commonly accepted form had its
genesis in the efforts of American anthropologists to classify the cul-
tures of Indian tribes occupying the American continents before the
coming of white men; the result of highly empirical investigations
which were hindered by an almost complete lack of historical data from which explanations might have been derived. The idea was brought to popularity by Clark Wissler only after it had been the common property of anthropologists working in the field of the American Indian for a generation or more, as Wissler himself insists.\footnote{Clark Wissler, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, p. 318.}

That is, anthropologists endeavoring to describe the culture traits observed in investigations of Indian life on this continent were struck by the regional or areal distribution revealed, and began, subconsciously, to refer to certain traits as belonging to certain regions. As Wissler says, “A general course of lectures upon the American Indians is almost certain to treat the tribes in groups, and though this grouping will differ slightly according to the individuality of the lecturer, the segregation of the tribes may be expected to follow, in the main, the accompanying schedule... Such grouping is convenient and practical and is justifiable, even if not absolutely inclusive.”\footnote{Ibid., pp. 318-319.}

This segregation of culture was first noted in the distribution of single traits or the complexes built up about some single element. A conspicuous example is that of the type house, the wigwam being characteristic of a large area in the wooded eastern portion of the continent, the tipi being the usual form of shelter on the western plains, the fishing tribes of the northwestern coast building and occupying large wooden homes, the tribes of the Southwest using pueblos of masonry, and so on. This naturally raised the question as to whether or not other traits would show a coincidence, whether culture formed a pattern which might be said to be characteristic of a given region. Wissler holds that there is such a cultural pattern: “If... we take all traits into simultaneous consideration and shift our point of view to the social, or tribal, units, we are able to form fairly definite groups. This will give us culture areas, or a classification of social groups according to their culture traits.”\footnote{Wissler, The American Indian, p. 218.}

In an area in which a characteristic form of dwelling, for example, is found, there would also be characteristic complexes describing clothing, food, and items of non-material culture, such as ceremonies. Wissler demonstrated the essential truth of this proposition in his work on the American Indians, cited above, and in subsequent works, by working out a division of indigenous North American culture into nine regional patterns, using a classification of nine categories which he says are universal, found in every large area. By the use of such methods, he concludes that “one can, as a mere matter of observation, convince himself that the geographical distribution of culture traits is regional. Anthropologists conceive, therefore, that tribal cultures are not solely the creation of a single tribe, but are units in a regional development.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 325.}

Not is this distribution of culture into regional patterns fortuitous. The influences of the environment, the geographic factors, make themselves felt to a considerable extent, especially through their effects upon the economic portion of the culture pattern. “In each case,” says Wissler, “the economic life of the tribe concerned is nicely adjusted to the principal food resource in its locality, and this type of adjustment extends as far as the particular resource is available and no farther.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 326.} Clothing and housing materials found within the region also dominate the forms these traits will assume, though there is some room for choice even in these matters.

This influence of geographic factors, working through the economic organization, extends even further: “When we turn to other aspects of tribal life, social organization, ceremonial procedure, etc., in the pursuit of which many wish to believe the spirit of man free to do its will, there is also a large degree of regional uniformity. We have just called attention to the tendency of all traits of culture to manifest regional distribution, but further inspection of them will show that their distributions largely coincide with the economic type and so are restricted to the same region. It is this tendency of all tribal traits of culture to coincide with economic traits that gives a regional character to culture as a whole. However, this does not mean that every element of culture has the same regional distribution, for we have just listed a fair number of traits found elsewhere. Also there are traits of culture that seem to have a continental distribution, or at least, cover a large part of a continent... However, when the details of such traits are closely scrutinized, they often reveal regional differences in procedure and in method. So, notwithstanding that all tribal cultures have something in common, the variations in procedure tend to conform to regional standards. Again, if we wholly ignore the tribe, and
consider the various culture traits separately, we find all but those having a range approaching universality to be spread out upon the earth in continuous distribution, or in that sense to be regional. In conclusion, we once more call attention to the concept of the geographical school that the tribal group is the first point of departure and that its total culture should be considered in its relation to the geographical region in which it is found. ... In matters of observation and fact, the claim is made that we do not know a culture trait until we know its geographical distribution."

This would seem to lead Wissler very close to geographic, or at least economic, determinism; and indeed he has been accused of carrying this tendency too far. But it seems somewhat doubtful if Wissler himself intended to go so far. He points out that "A tribe may exploit some of the resources in the surrounding environment but it does not exploit all of them at the same time, but specializes in a few." In his discussion of regional culture types, Wissler pointed out the fact that "many successive culture types could find homes in the same geographical environment. Thus a hunting type of culture once prevailed in England, later an agricultural mode of life developed, and now the culture of England may be characterized as industrial, yet the environment is the same."

He continues, "It seems then, that the relation between culture and the environment is rather a dynamic one, in that a culture type is, in fact at least, an exploitation of the immediate geographical environment. A small tribe of a thousand adults or less—and we have seen that most tribes are small in number—cannot carry on a culture comparable in complexity and richness to that in modern England; such a small group must specialize narrowly, not only in food production and material matters, but in social and intellectual life as well. What the tribe exploits among the many material resources of the habitat may or may not represent the line of least resistance; no one has studied the subject from this point of view. ... The environmental problem hinges upon the degree to which all the tribes in a region conform to one mode of life. The Eskimo, we are told, live only in Arctic lands; the Plains Indians lived on the open plains where the bison were found. Yet, as we have observed, the ceremonial practices and art of the

Eskimo are not found beyond the limits of Arctic environment and such practices as the sun dance, age societies, etc., are found only in the plains, in the bison country. On the other hand, no one has been able to demonstrate a causal relation between the environment and such nonmaterial traits of culture. The environment really holds together the tribes occupying a region, and develops a community of interest and concentrates leadership within itself. The tendency for a bison-hunting tribe is, first, to confine its wanderings to the bison range; secondly, to observe and fraternize with other bison-hunting tribes. Under such circumstances, it seems inevitable that the tribes within a region should follow much the same round of life. The influence of the environment thus appears as a passive limiting agency rather than a causal factor in the development of tribal life."

Wissler therefore seems to see the geographic environment exerting its influence largely by keeping tribes in contact with each other rather than by determining what their mode of life may or may not be. It is also to be noted that he clearly recognizes the dynamic relationship between geographic environment and a changing culture and the size and density of the population group. That is, he views the physical environment more as the stage upon which man operates than an active determinant in that action, reserving the latter role for social relationships.

This point is brought out even more clearly elsewhere by Wissler: "While it is clear that the geographical region has a powerful influence upon every type of primitive culture, it does not follow that future or past culture areas will have the same boundaries, even if there are no climatic changes. The economic basis to a culture area may change, as, a hunting culture may be displaced by agriculture. The boundaries and center of the former would depend upon the distribution of the chief game animals and the mode of hunting; whereas for the latter they would depend upon soil and climatic conditions. Even a change from one type of hunting to another might conceivably shift both the center and the boundaries. History and archaeology furnish sufficient evidence to justify these statements." And almost the same point of view is stated by Lowie in his consideration of the geographic influence: "Geography, powerful in shutting out cultural developments, often fails to stimulate them."

Such considerations led Wissler to

---

6 Wissler, *The American Indian*, pp. 318-337.
8 Ibid., pp. 346-349.
9 See *The American Indian*, pp. 338-339.
formulate definitions of the culture area as conceived by the anthropologists in general, though, of course, they are couched in his own terminology: "A culture area is delineated by listing the tribes with similar cultures and plotting their habitats upon a map. The geographical shapes of culture areas appear to vary according to the topography and other physical factors that enter into the environmental complex." 11

It is evident, of course, that not all tribes in any given area have built up the same culture patterns. Even in highly homogeneous regions there will be culture complexes more or less widely varying from one another. Further, the break between culture areas is not sharp and distinct but gradual except in rare cases where geographic or other factors prevent communication. Observation of this fact led the anthropologists to develop the idea of the culture center as a modification of the culture area concept. Here again economic influence is often seen as the determining factor, with geography underlying and reinforcing its efficacy. Obviously fishing tribes will remain near waters plentifully supplied with fish, and may thereby be led to build relatively permanent settlements. Likewise, tribes whose economic basis is the bison, will live within the bison range, and will be unable to build a settled social organization since they must follow the herds. Where the culture is based upon agriculture, geographic conditions of soil and climate will set natural limits to the area in which the dominant crop may be grown with sufficient success. This consideration also applies to the range utilized by certain game animals upon which a primitive culture may rest. In each case, the disappearance of the basic commodity of subsistence will not occur suddenly, but it will become less and less plentiful or possible of successful cultivation.

If the assumption that the entire culture is a unit is correct, it follows that the culture characteristic of any of these economic modes of life will disappear with the attenuation of the resource. This, of course, is merely another way of saying that the culture will be most typical of the area where the subsistence element is most plentiful; but it also leads to the corollary that a given culture will tend to extend itself to the limits of the area in which this economic base is to be found in sufficient quantity.

The theoretical expectation is supported by the results of actual observations. The characteristic culture is usually found to be the possession of a few social units well within the limits of the culture area, though not necessarily occupying a position in the geographic center of the area. These tribes will display nearly all, if not all, of the trait-complexes unique in the region. But as one proceeds from this characteristic group outward in any direction it is observed that the variations in the culture become greater and greater until they begin to assume a new pattern, characteristic of a neighboring culture area. This phenomenon has led Wissler to generalize the situation. "A culture area will comprise a nucleus of two or more neighboring tribes around which the others range roughly according to their degrees of similarity to that central group." 12 That is, the tribes occupying the central cultural position may be taken as typical of the area, but it is not to be expected that the entire area will be homogeneous. On the contrary, groups farther away will be marginal and may show characteristics of two or more culture areas, as has been demonstrated in many studies. 13

This, again, leads to the conclusion that boundaries for such areas cannot be marked upon the map as sharp thin lines, but must be considered as broad zones in most cases, sometimes so broad as to lead to consideration of the transition zone as a more or less separate culture area in itself. It also tends to fix attention on the culture center to the neglect of the culture area as a whole, a tendency especially notable in other disciplines, and not altogether lacking in anthropology, as is shown by Kroeber’s study of the Indians of California. Here he shows that as one approaches the center of the region, the culture becomes more and more homogeneous. 14 Similarly M. J. Herskovits points out that though the tribes occupying the central portion of the American Great Plains Region possess most of the traits considered typical of that area, those on the eastern and


12 Ibid., p. 348.


western margins have certain traits typical of regions to the east and west of the region, respectively.  

This, of course, brings up the whole question of diffusion, since it assumes that the culture probably originates in the culture center and is diffused over the region from that small area. Under this assumption any factor which prevented free communication, whether it were of geographic or cultural nature, would form a barrier to the diffusion process, and hence set a limit to the region. Thus large bodies of water, deserts, mountain ranges and similar geographic elements would serve as boundaries of regions in many cases, as was pointed out by Miss Semple.  

Further, diffusion would follow along the natural lines of communication, the river valleys, along mountain fronts, etc., where there is any serious handicap to travel and communication, rather than spreading in circular form as it might without such barriers. This process is illustrated by Miss Semple and Rupert B. Vance. However, barriers in one culture may become highways in another; as rivers are barriers without a technique of boatsing, but become highways once the technique is attained. Similarly water isolation of the British Isles was changed into ease of communication when the cultural situation of Europe arrived at a commercial stage in which the use of sailing vessels was important. In more primitive cultures such factors exert greater influence and are more apparent in the case of the Indian cultures than in our modern civilization. But this is not to say that such considerations lose force in modern society. As Wissler says: "... we see that the basis for the diffusion of trait-complexes is environmental and, to a large degree, also economic, since, whether primitive or civilized, man preys upon the organic resources of his habitat. So the immediate factors in the determination of diffusion boundaries are the fauna and flora. ... Were these uniformly distributed over the surface of the earth, there would be no such diffusion as now exists."  

Wissler’s conclusion may be questioned on the basis of advantages of division of labor, so far as small areas are concerned, but would seem valid when speaking of areas as large as those he has in mind. Further, there are culture complexes which seem to have always a large degree of uniqueness within one single tribe; language is perhaps the most obvious example, according to Wissler, although other complexes show the same characteristic in less degree. This means, of course, that no two tribes will possess identical culture, but it does not mean that no two tribes will have enough similarity of culture to allow the ethnologist to separate them from surrounding tribes. This is evident when the cultures are looked at as composite wholes, or when the individuals traits are separated and plotted on a map. What usually occurs is that the traits become more typical in some one small area, and thus indicate a culture center.  

This leads Wissler to offer another definition of the culture area: “By the culture area is meant an aggregation of tribes conforming in whole or in part to a type of culture as defined in terms of specific traits. Culture centers are thus revealed. However, these centers not only influence the neighboring tribes but one another. The study of widely distributed traits does not reveal contradictions to the belief in culture centers, but, on the other hand, tends to reveal the leading centers of culture influence in the world.” While it is true that regional cultures thus tend to become homogeneous wholes as a result of this creative function of the center, it is equally true that differing cultures may occupy a geographic region at the same time. In such a case, however, Wissler argues that there is the greatest likelihood of borrowing and that the culture with the greatest vigor will tend to become dominant at the culture center. Such is shown to have occurred in the Southwestern Region, where different cultures are in contact, he claims.

Such, in summary, is the culture area concept as developed by Wissler, who is usually given credit for its statement, though not for its origin. The idea is largely confined to American anthropologists, and undoubtedly arose because of the lack of historical materials by which the Indian culture of this continent could be explained. This, in turn, led to a view of the culture of a tribe as a whole, a functioning unit, rather than an attempt to break it into particular traits, the origin of which might have been traced historically. Because of this the American anthropologists have generally adopted the regional approach.
Moreover, the culture area concept is held to be as applicable to modern civilized areas as to those occupied by primitives. Wissler cites the development of power resources in northeastern America and northwestern Europe as a basis of such modern culture areas. From these centers there is a distinctly noticeable spread of other, non-material culture traits associated with the general culture pattern of the areas; and a gradual fading of the elements of this culture as one proceeds away from the center, he observes. Within the larger areas with their culture centers may also be located smaller areas, each with a center of its own. Thus the culture area concept would seem to hold out a research lead which may be of value in determining what is actually happening in any specific community, since the setting is fundamentally the same whether one studies primitive or civilized cultures.

This assertion is based on the observations that "Culture in the concrete is found in patches, instead of scattered at random throughout the world's population" and "One cannot read anthropological discussions without becoming aware that the procedure is based on a belief in regional differences in social behavior and that social evolution itself is regional." Further, the ethnological approach emphasizes the regional differences in culture, since specialization is usual in the study of a regional group, the investigator being led from one tribe to another similar one until the culture has changed sufficiently to be no longer homogeneous. This gives the investigator a dynamic, functional point of view, since the "primitive culture area . . . is not fixed, but a region in which culture changes are under way, a group of tribal communities differing more or less in culture, but continually adopting new traits, or variants of old ones, each at varying time intervals and not simultaneously." Such an approach, he argues, gives the investigator of contemporary life the problem of accounting for responses to situations, and an escape from the deadness of statistical description. However, techniques for the study of contemporary society by this method are yet to be worked out.

Since Wissler wrote the above, the Lynds, with their studies of Mid- dlestown; and Redfield, with his studies of Tepoztlan and Chan Kom, have applied this idea to contemporary situations with marked success. Also Wissler feels that the same principle is of great utility to the archaeologist, that by its application ancient culture areas will be delineated. Historically Greece and Egypt may be considered such centers of areas. Thus, after asserting that community and certain types of response are universal, and that the procedure of science is to discover principles of wide validity, Wissler concludes: "The question now is whether the concept of the culture area has wide validity; our discussions of regional phenomena fully justify the expectation that it has. . . . In general, then, the culture area concept promises to be a lead in social science."

Anthropologists are disagreed as to the correctness of that conclusion. For in spite of Wissler's insistence on the dynamic and functional nature of the culture area concept, it is objected by Bronislaw Malinowski, writing on cultural anthropology in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, that the idea of culture complexes takes a "lifeless and inorganic view," and treats culture as if it could be placed in cold storage for centuries, whereas the functional, and correct, view of the matter treats of relations of part to part and to the physical environment; that is, culture must be conceived as an organic whole which forms a milieu. However, it must be noted, Malinowski restricts this estimate to the term as used by Graebner and his followers, holding that the work of the American school in this respect constitutes "a valuable method of bringing out the influence of physical habitat as well as the possibilities of cultural transmission" and, as such, will have lasting value.

More to the point is the illustration of Lowie of the occupancy of the same region by the Hopi and Navajo with distinct, if not wholly exclusive, cultures. "Though the same building material is available . . . the Hopi construct the well-known terraced sandstone houses with a rectangular cell as the architectural unit, while the Navajo dwell in conical earth-covered huts." Of the same tenor is the

---

22 Clark Wissler, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, p. 351.
25 Clark Wissler, "The Culture Area Concept as a Research Lead," *ibid.*, XXXIII, p. 896.
criticism of Leslie Spier, who remarks that the idea that the cultural and geographic areas are coterminous has become so well accepted that anthropologists have fallen into the habit of filling in unknown spaces on the maps on the basis of known cultures on either side. The Havasupai, a tribe in Arizona, disclose the danger of such procedure, since an investigation of their culture did not meet the expectations so raised, the cultural step-down being surprising. This tribe, occupying one of the few rich oases in that territory, has adopted an agriculture similar to that of the Pueblo Indians, though the remainder of its culture is of the Great Basin type. However, they display no traits not found in similar form in other tribes nearby, though the combination of these traits is unique.28 Here, it would seem, we are dealing with a tribe on or near a cultural margin. Spier also points out that "Those who would derive the totality of a culture from its environment, as Wissler has of late been inclined, must reckon with the purely cultural facts that basic traits are by no means confined to a single culture area and that no culture area is uniform within itself."29 Though Spier would seem to be greatly overstating Wissler's position, it is true that the lack of homogeneity of traits is a favorite point of attack on all regional theories. Dixon also attacks the idea of the regularity of culture areas: "We have seen that in the diffusion of trait-complexes within the area of their origin the erratic spread does indeed produce a roughly zoned distribution, but one which is far from symmetrically concentric. The nucleus is rarely central in location and there is no necessary relation between the distance from the trait nucleus and the extent to which the complex is developed. Nor is there any similar relation in time, i.e., we cannot say that because one tribe is nearer to the nucleus of the trait complex than another, therefore it will receive the complex sooner."30

Dixon also insists that cultural changes take place on the periphery of culture areas rather than at the culture centers as indicated by Wissler, but distinguishes two sorts of diffusion; primary, or that taking place within the area, and secondary, that taking place between two culture areas; and thereby accepts the general idea of the culture area and its center as a point of diffusion for that area, as pointed out by Redfield.31


Perhaps the most severe criticism of the concept is that voiced by Carter A. Woods, who recalls that the concept was originally used only with reference to material culture traits but that later Wissler "gratuitously expanded the culture content of his areas to give the impression that culture areas were regions with relative uniformity of total culture"—a procedure which Woods characterizes as "sketchy, loose-edged handling of data."32 After distributing such non-material aspects of culture as social organization, political organization, sexual division of labor, war customs, marriage and family rites, criteria of prestige, means of self-gratification, and religion from the data on 118 tribes in Wissler’s culture areas, he concludes that the Wissler scheme leaves too much margin and that the nuclear groups are too large, often covering almost the entire area. Clearly, he argues, it was erroneous to include the Pueblo Indians in the general Southwestern Region.

Further, though it is possible to find nuclear groups: “These groups all show a relatively high homogeneity such as should be expected as a result of adaptation to common geographic conditions combined with the leveling effect of the diffusion process. They correspond roughly to Wissler’s culture types, but they constitute only a portion (sometimes a minor portion) of the total number of tribes within the culture area. There is no reason why they should serve as the basis of generalization for the entire area. The regions are too widely drawn to possess a relatively uniform culture. . . . It is also apparent that certain culture areas appear to possess more homogeneous traits and complexes than other areas.”33 On a statistical basis, this writer argues that in the case of mutually exclusive traits one should expect to find homogeneity in at least two-thirds of the cases, whereas the actual situation is nearer one-half. Hence: “Even as a static approach, Wissler’s culture areas leave much to be desired. Because there has been a tendency to draw them so carelessly and to interpret them so broadly, they have often failed to provide accurate information concerning the culture of specific tribes. . . . The failure of the distribution of non-material elements to coincide with the material culture areas does not, however, invalidate the regional approach. It is still possible to recognize the spatial distribution of culture elements and
the significance of this circumstance.” T. T. Waterman makes much the same criticism, stressing the intangible nature of the boundaries and the great importance of the culture center, and adds that culture elements change radically in time. In the case of the pueblo culture this is especially true, he says, since these structures were used for only a short time, relatively speaking.

Of a somewhat different nature is the criticism of Kroeber, who observes that the culture area concept is not concerned with the time element, except in the sense of the somewhat doubtful age-area concept. Further, anthropologists speak of culture areas when they are really interested in the content of such areas rather than the area itself. The concept was foreshadowed by Ratzel, and by Sophus Müller, who spoke of Europe as marginal to and to be explained only in terms of higher centers in the Orient; by Sapir, who discussed culture areas from the historical point of view as early as 1916. European anthropologists tend to reject the concept partly because of their interest in the historical-diffusionist idea.

In spite of these criticisms, Kroeber holds that the concept “represents normally a synthesis useful in the organization of knowledge, tinged with a subjective element, and yet evidently resting on something objective because empirical opinion tends to be in essential concord in specific cases. In all these points the culture area is analogous to the faunal or the floral area. In other words, it aims at determining and defining a natural area. Adjacent areas normally intergrade, and progressive dissection can therefore always analyze them out of existence. . . . The core of the concept, in particular instances, is likely to be the culture center, as Wissler has recognized. This, however, is likely to be not only a ‘crater’ of diffusing productivity, as Wissler has in the main treated it, but also a ‘focus’ or gathering point.”

Further, the idea might be given a better application by using traits from several complexes and thereby delimiting a small “center.” As developed by Wissler, the regions are unduly uniform in size, number

of tribes included, and the implied uniform level of culture. The idea has been used for descriptive purposes, though it lends itself to historical uses, and has emphasized the stabilizing and binding function of the environment, though there is yet considerable developmental work to be done here. Elsewhere the same writer has characterized the concept as “a non-philosophical, inductive, mainly unimpeachable organization of phenomena analogous to the ‘natural’ classification of animals and plants on which systematic biology rests.” (Thus the concept represents a consensus of opinion as to the classification of a mass of facts, slowly arrived at, contributed to by many workers, probably accepted in exact identity by no two of them, but in essential outlines by all.)

Herskovits adds that the concept has no time depth, and Sapir remarks that it is primarily descriptive, not historical, in its implications. Herskovits, however, also advances the idea that the cultural pattern enables the social scientist to lay open his problems much as the physiologist lays open the muscular system of the animal he is studying; that with history it enables the student to make an objective approach to his study of culture.

Essentially, it would seem, the disagreement lies largely in the matter of viewpoint. To those students who insist upon a strictly scientific approach through analysis, the culture area concept seems vague and even mystical, while to those who wish to look at the culture of a region or a people as a whole, it offers a tool grown up from empirical and inductive work in the field and from the nature of the problems attacked and the data accumulated. Perhaps the vital question affecting the validity of the concept is the coincidence of material and non-material elements of culture in areas to a degree sufficient to make separation of such areas a practical as well as an academic pursuit. Whether this can be done analytically or not remains to be seen; it is fairly certain that it is done empirically and by lay-

85 Kroeber, Anthropology, p. 336.
men daily in their references to various regional divisions of the nation.

Redfield, as a result of his study of a Mexican village, Tepoztlán, raises certain objections. The culture area concept is qualified, he thinks, by the gradual change of the culture from one region to another, by the failure to give due attention to the effect one region may have on another while remaining relatively passive, and by a lack of due emphasis on the essential question of communication as the means by which culture is diffused. Among primitives this matter of communication is not so important since "A cultural variation among such peoples spreads from its innovator to the person standing at his elbow, so to speak, and from him to the next within easy speaking distance." Hence the mode and character of communication should be the central point of attack in studies of culture distribution. Further, culture is essentially not the tool or form, but its significance to the user or performer, so that the culture area comes to be characterized as that area in which common things are given common meanings. This leads to doubt as to the validity of the concept under modern conditions of communication. Redfield illustrates his point by citing his finding in Tepoztlán that the central plaza with its immediately surrounding area is the locus of change in the culture of this village, and therefore, though centrally located, has become the cultural margin.

Certainly Redfield has pointed to limiting factors in the application of the culture area concept to modern cultures. These are supplemented by other criticisms of the sociologists. Whether their criticisms destroy its validity or not is another matter, of course. Empirically and impressionistically, it seems undeniable that, making all possible allowances for class differences, there are commonly recognized regions the essence of which is awareness by observers of the region as a whole of a general "spirit" or philosophy or Weltschauung. This applies with equal force to the "personality" of various cities within this country.

Wilson D. Wallis agrees with the position that a unique reality comes into being whenever and wheresoever men live together and

share a common heritage of thought, language, institutions, and technology. These entities may be plotted on a map, since every social phenomenon happens not only somewhere, but somewhere, and such plotting will facilitate the understanding of the geography of culture; but it is the relationship, the cultural pattern, rather than the area covered, which is important. As illustration, a radio, as a trait, has little significance, but when combined as an integral part of a culture pattern it creates new patterns and is itself changed into a new culture trait. That is, "Every new device calls for a psychological adjustment, which of course is a phase of adjustment within the culture." 43

These psychological adjustments constitute what Ruth Benedict refers to as "configurations," and what Edward Sapir calls "genuine culture." Miss Benedict applies the philosophy of the German school represented by Dilthey and Spengler to American Indian tribes, and finds that the pueblo dwellers are characterized by an Apollonian culture, though they are surrounded by tribes best described as Dionysian and there are no geographic barriers to account for the differences. These pueblo tribes are wholly socialized; the group is paramount in their thinking and feeling. Rites and ceremonies are provided for almost every conceivable contingency, so that the individual has little opportunity for the expression of his own feelings or desires. The result is that the tribes are sober and serious-minded. On the other hand, the plains tribes express their emotions in wild behavior, such as scarification or mutilation at the death of a family member. Such traits are combined into configurations, or behavior patterns, which are characteristic of areas and "stand to the understanding of group behavior in the relation that personality types stand to understanding of individual behavior." 44

Over a period of many generations such configurations should produce harmony within the area, though they may not; nor is it proven that they are coterminous with traits of material culture, according to this writer. By "genuine culture" Sapir refers to: "Those general attitudes, views of life, and specific manifestations of civilization which give a particular people its distinctive place in the world. Emphasis is put

not so much on what is done and believed by a people as on how what is done and believed functions in the whole life of that people, on what significance it has for them. . . . Culture thus becomes nearly synonymous with the 'spirit' or 'genius' of a people, yet not altogether, for whereas these loosely used terms refer rather to a psychological, or pseudo-psychological, background of national civilization, culture includes with this background a series of concrete manifestations which are believed to be peculiarly symptomatic of it. . . . Here, as so often, the precise knowledge of the scientist lags somewhat behind the more naive but more powerful insights of non-professional experience and impression."

Such culture is commonly found only within relatively small and autonomous groups, such as the Athenians of the time of Pericles, within which there can be found something like intensive spiritual contacts, and it is doubtful if it can spread over an area too wide for such contact, Sapir holds. This, moreover, is made almost impossible by our widespread political and economic organization and by our insistence upon standardization. The solution lies in the opportunity and desire to promote smaller cultural units, or regions, which should be largely non-comparable, or at least largely oblivious to each other.

From the above survey of the concept of the culture region it would appear that the idea is empirical and inductive; that it almost literally forced itself upon field anthropologists in its original form, and thereby has the stamp of authenticity and usefulness. However, it has been charged that the concept has been taken out of its original setting and made to do duty for which it was not fitted, or for which its fitness is yet to be demonstrated. It seems certain that the concept lacks the qualities of definiteness demanded by many social scientists. The geographical connotation of the term "area" should be largely ignored. The boundaries of culture areas are vague zones, or if a definite limit is set by statistical methods there remains an indefiniteness indicated by lack of homogeneity of the traits used as criteria. The center also is often vague; indeed it is conceivable that different complexes within the same pattern might have different

centers from which they are diffused. It has also been stated that the concept does not lend itself to historical treatment, that it is a cross section of culture in which the time element is missing or mixed, that it is merely a museum device. Here opinions differ, but it would seem that where and when historical data are available, the concept need not be applied, except in the sense in which it is used by Benedict and Sapir; that is, as having its essence in the relationships of the factors of the culture. Perhaps it is here that the greatest utility of the tool is to be found.

This concept of the culture area has been given expression by Goldenweiser in terms as clear and precise as could be found: "A culture area is Bastian's geographical province raised from a state of vagueness and abstraction to one of concreteness and relative precision. A culture area is characterized by a catalogue of traits or features material, artistic, religious, ceremonial, social (so far like a Graebnerian culture), but also by the way in which such features are associated, interrelated, colored by one another (an outlook quite beyond Graebner's horizon). Such culture complexes show remarkable tenacity and chronological persistence. The further concept of a culture center, arising from the attempt to find the locus of greatest incandescence of the culture of an area with a concomitant attenuation toward the periphery, has proved less serviceable. While attractive, it is also dangerous and seems difficult of application. The facts may be too complex for so simple a formulation." Goldenweiser also conceives the marginal areas as true culture areas in the psychological sense, and, like the writers quoted immediately above, lays particular stress on the psychological aspects of the entire concept—that is, the pattern or configuration of culture within the region. "An obvious homology to the culture pattern concept must be seen in Koffka's and Kohler's psychological theory of Gestalt. Similar categories are encountered in the study of organisms and of crystals. All these concepts are again related to the concepts of form and system in the plastic arts, music, and the abstract disciplines, such as mathematics and logic. Unless we are badly misguided, a concept of the general type of pattern or Gestalt may yet come to mark an epochal advance in our conceptual explorations."

Here we find a concept of the culture area removed as far as may be from the narrow limits of geography within which Wissler is

---

46 Ibid., pp. 401-423.
48 Ibid., p. 85, note.
accused of confining the idea; finding its existence in the minds of
men and connected with the earth only as men, by their specific
gravity, are forced to remain on or near the surface of the earth and
there construct their tools and their thoughts. But, it might be added,
man’s specific gravity is fairly stable, and it is very difficult to walk
through clay without taking on some of its color, a fact fully recog-
nized by Goldenweiser. It must also be kept in mind that the
marginal lines between the sociologists and the anthropologists are
scarcely distinguishable and that likewise the sociologists and human
ecologists must work closely together in many phases of their study.
We turn, therefore, next to the ecological approach.

Chapter XIV

EXPLORING THE REGION: THE ECOLOGISTS

In his introductory statement to the members of the Conference
on Regional Phenomena, held at Washington in April 1930,
Professor E. B. Wilson, as Chairman of the Social Science Re-
search Council, called attention to differences in point of view on
the regional concept between the geographer and the anthropologist
as reflected in discussion in previous conferences. This implication
that the regional concept and the techniques for the further explora-
tion of the region were limited primarily to these two disciplines was
followed by the suggestion that since other fields “have also started
to develop similar techniques,” it was thought advisable to get repre-
sentative investigators in different fields together for discussion. To
this end, representatives of some ten disciplines registered as members,
including the constituent members of the Social Science Research
Council, in addition to representatives of the National Research
Council, among whom were the Chairman of the Division of Biology
and Agriculture and the Chairman of the Division of Geology and
Geography, as well as representatives of the American Geographical
Society and of the American Museum of Natural History.1

We continue in Part II the presentation of materials which indicate
the contributions, techniques, and backgrounds of several of these
sciences in relation to regionalism. The next viewpoint, following
the discussions of the concepts of the geographers and anthropologists,
is that of the ecologists. The ecological region is logically next in
order for three reasons. One is because the ecological region and the
geographical region are often used interchangeably within recent

1 Conference on Regional Phenomena, 1930, p. 3.