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About the Author

Kenneth J. Guest is Professor of Anthropology at Baruch College, CUNY, and author of *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*. His research focuses on immigration, religion, globalization, ethnicity, and entrepreneurialism.

Professor Guest's ethnographic research in China and the United States traces the immigration journey of recent Chinese immigrants from Fuzhou, southeast China, who, drawn by restaurant, garment shop, and construction jobs and facilitated by a vast human smuggling network, have revitalized New York's Chinatown. His writing explores the role of Fuzhounese religious communities in China and the United States, the religious revival sweeping coastal China, the Fuzhounese role in the rapidly expanding U.S. network of all-you-can-eat buffets and take-out restaurants, and the higher education experiences of the Fuzhounese second generation.

A native of Florida, Professor Guest studied Chinese at Beijing University and Middlebury College. He received his B.A. from Columbia University (East Asian Language and Cultures), an M.A. from Union Theological Seminary (Religious Studies), and an M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from The City University of New York Graduate Center (Anthropology).

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Preface

Cultural Anthropology: A Fieldwork Journal

Welcome to the exciting adventure we call fieldwork! This Fieldwork Journal is designed to give you a firsthand experience of how anthropologists go about their work. I hope these exercises, drawn from activities developed in my classroom, will reveal how fieldwork provides a valuable toolkit for gathering information to make decisions in your own life. Fieldwork skills and strategies can help you navigate the many unfamiliar or cross-cultural experiences you will encounter in this rapidly globalizing world, whether at work or at school, in your community, on the job, or in your family. And I hope you will see how key fieldwork strategies can help you become a more engaged and responsible citizen of the world.

Ethnographic fieldwork is the unique strategy that anthropologists—particularly cultural anthropologists—have developed to put people first as we analyze how human societies work. Chemists conduct experiments in laboratories. Economists analyze financial trends. Historians pore over records and library archives. Anthropologists start with people and their local communities.

Through fieldwork, we try to understand people's everyday lives, to see what they do and to understand why. We participate in their activities, take careful notes, conduct interviews, take photographs, and record music as we try to see the world through their eyes. We make maps of communities, both of the physical environment and of family and social relationships. Although careful observation of the details of daily life is the first step, through intensive fieldwork anthropologists look beyond the taken-for-granted, everyday experience of life to discover the complex systems of power and meaning that people construct to shape their existence, including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, kinship, and economic and political systems. As we extend our analysis as anthropologists, we try to see how local lives compare to others and fit into larger human patterns and global contexts.

Fieldwork experience is considered an essential part of an anthropologist's training. It is the activity through which we learn the basic tools of our trade and hone those skills—careful listening and observation, engagement with strangers, cross-cultural interaction, and deep analysis of human interactions and systems of power and privilege. Through fieldwork we learn empathy for those around us, develop a global consciousness, and uncover our own ethnocentrism. Indeed, fieldwork is a rite of passage,

an initiation into our discipline, and a common bond among anthropologists who have been through the experience.

So welcome to this Fieldwork Journal! I hope you will find fieldwork to be as eye-opening, thought-provoking, and life-changing as I have.

Journal of Anthropology: A Fieldwork Journal

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...we will fieldwork! This Fieldwork Journal is designed to help you understand the experience of how anthropologists in the field work. I hope that the strategies developed in my classroom will help you in your own fieldwork. The Fieldwork Journal will help you understand the main strategies for gathering information to make decisions in the field. The Fieldwork Journal will help you understand the main strategies for gathering information to make decisions in the field. The Fieldwork Journal will help you understand the main strategies for gathering information to make decisions in the field.

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Fieldwork: Tips for Getting Started

Fieldwork may seem unfamiliar or uncomfortable, especially meeting new people and crossing cultural boundaries. Here are some tips my students have found helpful for getting started.

1. Prepare

Read about the people, organization, and place you will be visiting beforehand. Prepare interview questions. Gather tools for note-taking, photography, audio, and video recording. Be on time.

2. Ask Permission

Seek informed consent from potential participants. Give them a chance to say yes or no. Be honest and direct about who you are and what you are doing.

3. Participate and Observe

Participate in the group's activities to experience their lives from the inside. Beware your ethnocentrism—judging others based on your own cultural assumptions.

4. Sit Still

Don't race in and out. Stay as long as you can, without wearing out your welcome. See what is actually happening rather than what you expected to find.

5. Listen Carefully

Ask good questions and listen carefully to answers. Notice who is saying what to whom.

6. Take Careful Notes

Write extensive notes, both during and after your fieldwork. Take note of seemingly unimportant matters, which may prove significant later.

7. Notice Silences

What is not being said? Who is not in the room? Silences and absences reveal important insights but are difficult to notice.

8. **Map Inside and Out**
Sketch the inside and outside of your fieldwork site, including both the place and the people. Sitting still and drawing may reveal unnoticed physical features and group dynamics.
9. **Embrace Being Insider and Outsider**
While participating and observing inside a community, anthropologists simultaneously bring an outsider's perspective to analyze what they are seeing and experiencing.
10. **Leave Room for the Unexpected**
Be patient, flexible, and open to the unexpected. Allow the ethnographic experience to develop on its own terms, not necessarily on your schedule.
11. **Be Open to Mutual Transformation**
Your worldviews and those of people you study may be transformed by your fieldwork interactions.
12. **Return**
Rapport and the quality of your research will deepen exponentially with each return visit.
13. **Protect Those You Study**
Do no harm. Consider ways that things you learn could cause harm if you carelessly revealed them. Provide anonymity if necessary, masking names, places, and identifiers. Always ask permission.
14. **Say Thank You**
Acknowledge people's generosity in sharing their time and stories with you. Find ways to return the generosity, perhaps by reporting back your findings.
15. **Analyze**
Reflect on your fieldwork experience. What patterns emerge? What connections did you see between local and global? What dynamics of power and stratification did you find? What concepts in *Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* (or *Essentials*) help deepen your analysis?

Anthropology in a Global Age: Making a Can of Coke Unfamiliar

Anthropology's holistic, cross-cultural, and comparative approach can help us think more deeply about other people and cultures and live more consciously in our global world. As humans we take for granted many things about our lives and how the world works, whether it is our notions of race or the cheap cost of a bar of chocolate or a can of Coke. But anthropologists often describe how doing fieldwork can make the familiar strange and the strange familiar.

Conducting research across cultures helps develop our anthropological perspective. Beliefs and practices, which may at first seem strange, may become very familiar over time. The anthropological perspective can also enable us to perceive our own cultural activities in a new light. Even the most familiar aspects of our lives may then appear exotic, bizarre, or strange when viewed through the lens of anthropology. Through this cross-cultural training, anthropology offers the opportunity to unlock our ability to imagine, see, and analyze the incredible diversity of human cultures, including our own.

Our lives are entangled with things, what anthropologists refer to as *material culture*. Yet the stuff of our daily lives can become invisible—so familiar that we take it for granted. If we pay attention, however, stuff talks.

Take a can of Coke for instance. Coke is perhaps the most iconic item in American culture. And you can find Coke in almost every country in the world. But what do you really know about a can of Coke? What can you learn about yourself, your culture, and the world around you by considering this soft drink more carefully?

A can of Coke has a social life all its own. It is produced, distributed, and consumed. It moves about through space, is acted upon by others, and shapes people's lives in return. Igor Kopytoff suggested that all commodities—all things bought and sold—have a biography, and Arjun Appadurai urged anthropologists to consider the “social life of things.” By this they mean that things, even very familiar things, tell a story that often reveals a great deal about who we are as humans, what we value, how our cultures work, and, in a time of increasing globalization, how the world works.

In the following exercise, try to look at a can of Coke through an anthropologist's eyes. Try to make something that is very familiar into something very strange by seeing beyond the label and the image to the complex set of human interactions that are organized around a can of Coke.

YOUR TURN

Buy a can of Coke and put it on your desk. Consider the following questions and gather data to help the story of a can of Coke come alive.

1. What is in it? Where did the ingredients come from?

2. Who made it? What is life like for those who made it?

3. What is the impact of Coke on the local community where it is produced? Do they drink it? Do they work in the factory that makes it? How much do they earn? How much has the Coca-Cola factory changed their lives? Has it affected people in the community differently depending on their age, gender, or class?

4. What is the impact of a can of Coke on the community where it is consumed? What are the health impacts? The environmental impacts? Where does the waste end up—landfills, the ocean, recycled, repurposed?
