

In an individualistic culture such as the United States, face as conceived of by the Chinese, with their thousands of years of history under the influence of the tenets of Confucianism, does not exist. The actions of the Chinese in this anecdote are almost incomprehensible for Americans, who, in contrast, are constantly bombarded by messages urging efficiency, honesty, directness, and personal responsibility for one's actions. The Chinese actions were based on the need to preserve everyone's face; the American's expectations, however, were based on achievement or completion of the desired outcome. Chapter 6 will look more closely at face and communication strategies.

Societal Roles

Human behavior occurs in widely different social and cultural contexts. Numerous variables, such as social position, social roles, norms, social control, and social structure, influence human behavior. Although these variables exist across all cultures, the relative importance, classifications, types, interpretations, and responsibilities assigned to different variables vary cross-culturally. *Position* identifies an individual's place in social space. A woman can occupy the position of daughter, mother, or sister in kinship space, of faculty member, committee member, or departmental chairperson in occupational space. It is possible for one individual to occupy all of these positions in a lifetime, often simultaneously. Every member of society occupies various different positions. When individuals occupy a given position, their *role* is comprised of the designated or expected behavior that accompanies that position. Whether a person's role is that of a child, parent, employer, teacher, or senator, that individual's behavior is guided by the role expectations held by others within that same culture.

Through the enculturation process, members of a cultural group acquire requisite socially acceptable behavior. *Social control*, the enforcement of the shared standard of conduct governing the behavior of group members, ensures individuals' adherence to this behavior. Societies vary in how they are structured and in how strict they are in terms of social control. Societal roles have important consequences for the behavior of individuals. Who an individual is, how this individual is related to other members of society, and the status ascribed to or achieved by this individual are important culturally determined roles. Cultures will assign dif-

ferent dimensions and activities to roles. What may be considered women's work or masculine emotions in one culture may be the reverse in another. Hall (1959) points out that great emotion is expected of men in Iran but of women in North American or northern European cultures. In many African and Native American cultures, heavy farm labor and carrying cumbrous burdens are seen as women's work (see chap. 5). (See **Activity B—Proverbs**)

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the belief in the intrinsic superiority of one's own culture, language, and/or ethnic group. Because it involves emotions, it is not an intellectual exercise of comparing one culture with another culture. It is a highly subjective, personal, emotional, and (usually) subconscious way of valuing one's own culture above other cultures. The symbols of a cultural group's ethnicity, religion, and the like are objects of pride and veneration. There is the tendency to judge members of other cultures on the basis of one's own personal cultural standards. For example, instead of trying to understand Mexicans within their own cultural milieu, an ethnocentric American attempts to understand them as similar to or different from Americans.

To some extent, everyone is ethnocentric. It is the norm for members of a cultural group to consider their own culture as the standard against which to judge others. In fact, many languages intrinsically convey a sense of ethnocentrism. In Chinese, the word for China means "middle kingdom," as historically the Chinese considered their country to be the center of the world. In the Navajo language, the word for Navajo people, *Diné*, means "the people." By implication, all non-*Diné* are non-people or people of lesser status. People living in the United States refer to themselves as "Americans," ignoring the fact that everyone who lives in North, Central, and South America is also American. In the 18th century, when the Dutch occupied Taiwan, the local inhabitants were surprised to see Westerners, with their very different features, and referred to them as *a-dou-a*, which literally translates as "big nose." The phrase became generalized to mean any foreigner, that is, anyone not exhibiting "normal" Asian features.

Ethnocentrism is also reflected in the maps of the world. The Mercator projection, which has been commonly used in North America and