The Cultural Metaphoric Method
Description, Analysis, and Critique

Martin J. Gannon
California State University San Marcos, USA

ABSTRACT This article describes, analyzes, and critiques the cultural metaphoric method. It also compares briefly the strengths and weaknesses of the bi-polar or dimensional method and the cultural metaphoric method. A cultural metaphor is any activity, phenomenon, or institution which all or most members of an ethnic or national culture consider important and with which they identify closely both intellectually and emotionally (Gannon, 2004; Gannon and Pillai, 2009). Each cultural metaphor is derived inductively using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; see also Gannon and Audia, 2000). The article begins with a description of grounded theory, followed by a description of the cultural metaphoric method, an analysis of it, and a critique addressing some major issues. The focus of this article is on national cultures, although the method can be used to provide insight into ethnic cultures within and across nations and clusters of national cultures.

KEY WORDS • cultural metaphor • emic–etic distinction • testing of cultural metaphors

There are many ways of studying ethnic and national cultures. Two of the most general ways are etic or culture-general and emic or culture-specific. These terms originated in linguistics and refer to the sounds of languages. Etic sounds are those found within all or almost all cultures; emic sounds are specific to a particular culture or a small number of cultures. The well-known bi-polar or dimensional research by Hofstede (2001) and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) in the GLOBE study reflect the etic or culture-general approach, which dominates the cross-cultural fields of management and psychology. The concept underlying this culture-general method is to construct a large-scale survey that can be administered across numerous national cultures or societies, after which the researchers derive several scales, e.g., individualism–collectivism or the degree to which the individual sees himself as part of a group and makes decisions accordingly, even to the extent that he will subordinate his own needs and desires to group values and
norms. National cultures or national societies can then be ranked on each of these dimensions so that a profile of each emerges.

The work of Geertz (1973), Gannon (2004; see also Gannon and Pillai, 2009), Nielsen and Mariotto (2005/6), Nielsen, Soares, and Machado (under review), and Montague and Morais (1975) are representative of the emic approach. These authors attempt to move beyond general descriptions or profiles of each ethnic or national culture or national society into a more in-depth understanding of it through the use of cultural metaphors. A cultural metaphor is any activity, phenomenon or institution with which all or most members of an ethnic or national culture or even a cluster of similar cultures located close to one another (e.g., the Scandinavian nations) identify closely and to which they react emotionally and intellectually, e.g., the Japanese garden and the Swedish stuga or simple, unadorned weekend and summer home.

In the first part of this article, there is an explanation of grounded theory, through the use of which each in-depth or emic description of a national culture is derived. This is then followed by a description, analysis, and critique of the cultural metaphoric method.

**The Grounded Theory Method**

This method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). They comparatively analyzed grounded theory and logico-deductive theory, the latter of which emphasizes the testing of hypotheses derived from a theory. Frequently, this logico-deductive theory is based on another prominent theory or theoretical perspective, and as a consequence, the tests of its hypotheses tend to result in only minor changes in the theoretical perspective, since the system is partially or largely closed to new viewpoints. Glaser and Strauss (1967) are particularly harsh toward the well-known work of Blauner (1964), who described four types of alienation largely based on Marx’s theory of alienation while not supposedly entertaining new viewpoints and ideas. They commented scathingly: ‘In short: Verify (and qualify) this great body of received theory – with every expectation of its relative accuracy. Fortunate indeed are we for our perceptive ancestors!’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 125).

In some ways this charge can be leveled against the bi-polar approach. Hofstede (1967), using only 22 questionnaire items, constructed four scales, some of which are significantly inter-correlated, particularly individualism–collectivism and power distance extending from low to high (r=0.35). One of the best and least-mentioned features of his 1980 work, as in the case of Blauner’s review of Marxist alienation, is his discussion of the long historical evolution of the framework underlying his four dimensions (see Parsons, 1935, for an earlier but related and pioneering discussion. Parsons introduced the work of such social theorists as Durkheim, Pareto, and Weber to the English-speaking world and discussed at length such concepts as individualism–collectivism and alienation.) While most of the discussions of Hofstede’s work have focused on the reliability and validity of his four scales and the wording of the items purportedly representing them (Kirkman et al, 2006), only limited attention has focused on the partially closed system that they represent. In fact, the swirling debates about the naming of the scales and the items included within them are related directly to the long, historical evolution of this framework.

House and the GLOBE researchers seemed to be aware of this problem, even to the extent of having one well-known cultural anthropologist, Michael Agar, as part of the team. They also employed society-specific researchers in each of their 62 national societies, who contributed ideas and survey items to the final questionnaire.
Still, while the number of dimensions they discovered increased to nine, Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, and Gibson (2005) argued that the scales of the GLOBE study overlapped significantly with the Hofstede study and, at best, introduced three novel dimensions: Performance Orientation, Humane Orientation, and Societal Orientation. In this sense the GLOBE study may also represent a partially closed system. However, the GLOBE study did introduce several innovations, such as differentiating between cultural values and practices while clustering the 62 national cultures into four groups on each scale rather than rank ordering them, as Hofstede did with his 53 national cultures. It also updated Hofstede’s 1980 discussion of the theoretical constructs underlying the development of the survey and specified two types of individualism–collectivism, organizational and institutional.

Schwartz (1994) also appeared to be aware of the closed-system problem Glaser and Strauss criticized. He employed psychologists in the nations studied and asked them to submit items reflective of their specific cultures, after which he subjected the survey data to analyses at both the cultural and individual levels, deriving cultural dimensions at both the level of culture and of the individual. He also surveyed both students and teachers with the assumption that they represent the major value systems in their national cultures. His dimensions such as conservatism, mastery and intellectual autonomy seem quite different from those developed in the Hofstede study and the GLOBE study, although many of them correlated significantly with the Hofstede measures at the cultural level. In short, both the GLOBE study and the Schwartz study seemed to be moving from the purely etic approach Hofstede championed to a mix between etic and emic approaches.

Grounded theory can be succinctly described as an inductive method designed to discover theory from data, rather than allowing the accepted theory to narrow the range of enquiry. Strauss and Corbin (1990) offer a more precise definition:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discussed, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with one another. One does not begin with a theory and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study, and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. (p. 23)

However, the developers of grounded theory are not completely opposed to the logico-deductive framework, for at some stage – typically the final stage – a grounded theory must meet the canons of science and be empirically tested. Still, they do argue against an over-reliance on prominent theoretical perspectives that narrow the vision of the researcher and the range of enquiry. Thus, they believe in the importance of formal theory in which hypotheses are formally derived inductively and tested, but they also feel that this formal theory should be substantive in the sense that it is grounded in some way to the phenomenon it is trying to explain. In short, hypothesis testing is the final stage of the process, and the hypotheses should be grounded in real-world experiences. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 5) frame their perspective as follows: ‘Thus, one canon for judging the usefulness of a theory is how it was generated – and we suggest that it is likely to be a better theory to the degree that it has been inductively developed from social research.’

Another belief of grounded theorists is that the theory should be readily understandable by academic researchers and laypeople alike. They believe strongly that triangulation – using a variety of methods such as historical records, qualitative data provided through means such as structured and semi-structured interviews and panel discussions, questionnaire surveys, and quantitative data of a statistical nature – should be used to gather data and confirm the research conclu-
sions (see also Denzin, 1978). When, and if, there are conflicts, then additional data from a variety of sources should be collected until the conflicts disappear.

Glaser and Strauss equate grounded theory with ‘the constant comparative method of analysis’ which should be continued until repetition of responses and information occurs and no new information is forthcoming, a phenomenon they call ‘saturation’. They contrast statistical sampling (in which the samples selected are predetermined) and theoretical sampling (which is used with the grounded theory method). Theoretical sampling ends when saturation is reached. Obviously there is an element of subjectivity associated with theoretical sampling. Still, saturation tends to be easily recognized by researchers using grounded theory. It is only after theoretical sampling ends that statistical testing or the formal testing of hypotheses representing a broadened theoretical framework takes place. Formal testing of hypotheses does not occur simply after a review of the literature, even as thorough a review as Hofstede completed.

The originators of grounded theory have described in depth the manner in which a specific grounded theory should be tested. However, their research focuses primarily on work organizations. The study of national cultures requires some modifications, simply because of the size and complexity of the endeavor. We are in uncharted waters in this regard, as there are only meager attempts at the statistical testing of cultural metaphors, as explained below. In the final analysis, statistical testing must occur in the final stage or stages. Otherwise, the writing can be attacked as merely journalistic or literary rather than social scientific.

**Constructing Cultural Metaphors**

For many years metaphors were treated only as linguistic devices suitable for creative thought and creative writing courses. However, Ortony (1975) basically argued that metaphors are not only nice, but necessary, as the title of his well-known article explicitly states. His point of view was consistent with Lakoff and Johnson’s position (1980, p. 1) that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, and that the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. That is, metaphors frame the manner in which we interpret the world and the activities within it. For Ortony and Lakoff and Johnson, a metaphor is using the characteristics of one phenomenon to describe another phenomenon, a definition consistent with the construction of cultural metaphors as described in this article.

Clifford Geertz (1973) is generally recognized as the researcher who created the initial interest in using cultural metaphors as descriptors of ethnic and national cultures. As a Fulbright professor in Bali, he had difficulty obtaining information from citizens who could facilitate his research as informants. They were very polite but evasive. One day he attended an illegal cockfight simply out of boredom. The police arrived, at which time everyone fled, including Geertz. As he was running down an alley, a person waved that he should enter a home; the hostess was putting a tablecloth on a table in the home’s courtyard and indicated that he should sit. Moments later the police arrived; immediately the host shouted indignantly that the police were interfering with the celebratory dinner in honor of Geertz, their distinguished Fulbright professor, about whom he knew a good amount of information, to Geertz’s surprise. After the police left, there was much joviality and breaking down of the barriers separating Geertz and others.

This led Geertz into a statistical study of 500 cockfights and, more importantly, to the proposition that the cockfight represented the essentials of Balinese culture, particularly male Balinese culture. (It should be noted that these statistical tests were preliminary in
nature and not the final stage of the research process, which is a fundamental requirement of grounded theory. Geertz’s work falls clearly into the realm of interpretative cultural anthropology that accords a secondary or limited role to statistical testing of a theoretical framework and the hypotheses directly related to it, in this case whether the Balinese cockfight genuinely represents Balinese culture.) Each cockfight pitted individuals, families, and even neighboring villages against one another. The victor – whether individual, family, or village – was symbolically giving a delicious and public insult to the loser that would not be countenanced in everyday life. In essence, Geertz had created a cultural metaphor for Bali.

This study is well known, consistently popular, and required reading in many universities and colleges. Paradoxically, it did not motivate other researchers to create cultural metaphors for other ethnic and national cultures. For one exception, see Montague and Morais (1975), who also did not formally test any hypotheses at the final stage or stages of research. While the field of cultural anthropology was interested in metaphors, the discussion of them tended to be abstract and difficult to apply to business situations (see, for example, Fernandez, 1991).

The author of this article was not very interested in studying cross-cultural differences or cultural metaphors until he served as a Kennedy/Fulbright Professor at Thammasat University in Thailand in 1988. His basic belief at the time was that cultural differences did not significantly matter in the many types of U.S. organizations in which he had worked, providing that the playing field was level.

For his stay, he prepared thoroughly by studying the history, demography, religion, and language of Thailand, and by reading Hofstede’s 1980 book. While he accepted Hofstede’s profile of Thailand and the Thais before living there, he was perplexed by the behavior of Thais that he experienced. For example, Hofstede profiled them as collectivistic, whereas the author saw them as a mixture of individualism and collectivism, depending upon the situation. It was not until he read John Fieg’s description comparing Thais to U.S. Americans that he felt that he was making progress in understanding the Thais (Fieg, 1976; Fieg and Mortlock, 1989). In both cultures there is a love of freedom, a dislike of pomposity, and a pragmatic outlook. Fieg characterizes Thai behavior and values in terms of a rubber band held loosely between the fingers of both hands. In this authority-ranking culture, the band tightens only periodically when a direct order is given, after which it is immediately loosened and relaxed behavior reoccurs. By contrast, Fieg portrays U.S. American behavior and values in terms of a taut string held between the fingers of both hands most of the time, and seldom is the string loosened. Other U.S. expatriates with whom Gannon talked and who had read this book also indicated that this short description, which takes up only a few paragraphs, provided an apt description of what they were experiencing.

Eventually, through the seminar described below, he was able to identify a cultural metaphor for Thailand, the Thai Kingdom. Most, if not all, Thais revere the King, even to the point of viewing him as a semi-deity. The first feature of this metaphor became loose vertical hierarchy, as Thailand is a hierarchical culture but Thais only loosely follow rules and commands unless a leader gives a very direct and unambiguous command, as our discussion of the rubber band suggests. In the King’s case, he has called several Prime Ministers to the Palace over a period of 60 years and asked for their resignations, which were immediately submitted. Freedom and equality represent the second feature. Thailand is one of the few nations in the world that has never been conquered and the only undefeated nation in Southeast Asia. Similar to U.S. Americans, they believe in freedom and equality. Finally, the third
feature is the Thai smile, which represents the Thais’ unending search for a comfortable interpersonal environment, although it does not necessarily connote friendship. A Thai may smile even when he detests the behavior of the other person in order to achieve harmony, just as the King evokes harmony and peace through his adroit handling of Prime Ministers. For a complete description, see chapter 2 of Gannon and Pillai (2009).

Parenthetically, Hofstede seems to have had some difficulty deciding whether a specific culture is individualistic or collectivistic. In the 1980 book, he classified Japan as individualistic, as it ranked 22/23 on individualism–collectivism. Half of the 53 nations were classified as individualistic and half as collectivistic. In his 1991 book he used a tripartite classification system, which effectively put Japan into the middle cluster that was collectivistic.

After his return from Thailand to the United States, the author decided to form an MBA/Ph.D. seminar. He wanted to create cultural metaphors for a large number of nations but needed the help of knowledgeable and motivated graduate students, many of whom became co-authors in this endeavor; several have gone on to distinguished academic careers (see Gannon, 2004, for a listing of co-authors in the preface). As described in chapter 1 (Gannon, 2004), the objectives included the following, namely to: 1) study a selected national culture in depth using such theoretical perspectives as those of Hall (Hall and Hall, 1990), Hofstede (1980 and 2001), and Kluckholn and Strodtbeck (1961), as well as a large number of additional variables, such as each national culture’s history, its demographics, geography, and religion or religions (see chapter 1 in Gannon, 2004, or Gannon and Pillai, 2009); 2) identify a cultural metaphor for a specific national culture; and 3) write a readable chapter whose subheadings would be the major features (typically three to seven) of each metaphor, and in the process show how these prominent features are activated within each national culture in a manner consistent with the nation’s cultural metaphor, particularly in business.

It is important to note that, at the time when the MBA/Ph.D. seminar began in the late 1980s, there were a wide variety of cross-cultural approaches but few that were widely accepted in and across the cognate fields of cultural anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural management. Hofstede’s 1980 book was beginning to receive wide acceptance in the fields of cross-cultural psychology and cross-cultural management, in large measure due to the fact that other researchers using surveys were able to confirm the four-dimensional approach he derived from theory. One group of researchers, titled The Confucius Connection, expanded Hofstede’s framework into five dimensions, adding short-term/long-term time orientation, with which Hofstede agreed (The Confucius Connection, 1987).

Similarly Edward T. Hall’s cultural anthropological framework enjoyed both popularity and critical acceptance, and it is still influential in today’s world. For example, Richard R. Gesteland (2005) classifies national cultures primarily through the use of Hall’s framework. Further, many writers regard the Kluckholn/Strodtbeck framework as both insightful and very useful, as it combined the cultural anthropological or emic perspective and the etic or dimensional perspective uniquely. They argued that cultures vary across six dimensions that Western thought has emphasized at least since the 15th century, that each culture has a dominant orientation in terms of these six dimensions, but that other weaker orientations may exist simultaneously in its different geographic regions and racial and ethnic groups.

Most importantly, the students in the seminar possessed variable amounts of knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences. We needed a way to standardize how each student would collect information and data in their research and interviews. Hence
we reviewed the perspectives above at the beginning of the semester seminar before allowing the students to begin data collection and interviews.

This grounded approach to culture required an enormous amount of work, and Gannon almost gave up on the project after a year. The encouragement and advice offered by the cultural anthropologist Michael Agar, a colleague and friend at Maryland, proved invaluable and motivated him to continue. After six years of work, Gannon and his students were able to meet the objectives of the seminar for 17 national cultures in the first edition of the book *Understanding Global Cultures* (Gannon, 1994). This first edition contained only a preface, the introductory chapter, and one chapter for each national culture. Over time the complexity and length of the book increased significantly; there are now 12 parts and 34 chapters in the fourth edition and the range of topics is highlighted in the subtitle: ‘Metaphorical Journeys through 29 Nations, Clusters of Nations, Continents, and Diversity’ (Gannon and Pillai, 2009).

Nielsen and Mariotto (2005/6) and Nielsen, Soares, and Machado (under editorial review) appear to be the only other current researchers using grounded theory to create cultural metaphors for national cultures. They, however, have not proceeded to the final stage, hypothesis testing. Nielsen and co-authors have developed two metaphors, the Argentinean tango and Portuguese *fado*. She relies on a deep understanding of these cultures through the use of knowledgeable insiders and extended stays in a national culture. In general, she follows the methodology Gannon outlined in chapter 1 of his book, although there are some variations, as noted below. Also, there is at least one doctoral dissertation that focuses on the metaphor for Italy and refines part of it when applied to large cities such as Rome and Milan (see Venezia, 1997).

Analysis

As indicated above, grounded theory argues that the researcher must eventually test hypotheses. Gannon, Gupta, Audia, and Kristof-Brown provide such tests (2005/6). They selected six nations and developed two separate paragraph descriptions for each nation using Gannon’s book (1994), only one of which paragraph explicitly mentioned the cultural metaphor for that nation. They also developed questionnaire items for each nation. They then examined two nations at a time, creating three separate questionnaires. University students in each of the six nations (n= 664) then completed the appropriate questionnaire. Also, they employed the standard translation-retranslation process. Questionnaire #1 was completed in India and the United States; questionnaire #2, Germany and Italy; and questionnaire #3, Taiwan and Britain. For example, the instructions for the U.S. American and Indian students were: ‘Please indicate, by filling in any number between 0 ands 10, the degree to which you agree that each statement or description represents the United States. Then, alongside this rating, please indicate the degree to which you feel each item represents India. Use 0 for do not agree at all and 10 for totally agree, or any number in between.’ At the top of each page for the items, the header read: ‘MOST PEOPLE IN MY COUNTRY,’ followed by approximately 50 items derived from the two appropriate chapters in Gannon’s book. These items were designed as sentence fragments to complete the header placed at the top of the page (MOST PEOPLE IN MY COUNTRY) and there were two spaces alongside each item in which to record the two responses for each item. A similar process was used for the four paragraphs included in each questionnaire, two for each nation. (The full questionnaire is available in Gannon (2001) and on his website: www.csusm.edu/mgannon under the topic: Gannon’s *Working Across*
Cultures: Applications and Exercises. See Exercise 4.1, Questionnaire Items, and Exercise 4.2, Paragraph Descriptions (Figures 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6.) Individual questionnaire items were factor analyzed for two nations at a time to derive independent measures; t-tests for independence were then employed to compare the two nations on each measure in each of the three comparisons.

This research strongly supports both the validity of these six cultural metaphors and the proposition that cultural metaphors can be used as frames of reference for understanding each nation and its culture. Second, this research uncovered both etic and emic dimensions for each culture. For instance, the three factor analyses confirmed that individualism–collectivism is a major dimension of each of the six cultures. However, it should be observed that Gannon (1994 and 2004) describes many different types of individualism and of collectivism particular to each national culture, for example competitive individualism for the United States as expressed in American football; proud and self-sufficient individualism for Spain as expressed in the Spanish bullfight; and Indian collectivism expressed in the religion-dominated Hindu family system.

When only one standard questionnaire is used across many national cultures or societies, such refined and in-depth descriptions are not possible. Further, most of the dimensions found in this study were emic rather than etic. This implies that etic studies based solely or largely on a single standard questionnaire should be supplemented by additional in-depth analyses and methods associated with grounded theory. Finally, this study refined the initial emic dimensions or features of each cultural metaphor found in Gannon (1994). Again, this follows the logic of grounded theory, as each metaphor was developed inductively using a variety of methods and then tested empirically and refined accordingly.

Critique

As is the case of any method, there are strengths and weaknesses associated with the cultural metaphoric method. The author has compiled a comparative list of the strengths and weaknesses associated with the etic or bi-polar method and the cultural metaphoric method. Using a five-point scale going from very low to very high, he was able to derive this profile of each method that involved 14 features (Gannon, 2007).

For example, the bi-polar method seems superior to the cultural metaphoric method in terms of its ease of using statistical testing relative to relating the cultural measures to other measures such as rates of national innovation and economic growth; ease of comparing specific national cultures in terms of comparative profiles; and susceptibility to distortions and inaccurate stereotyping. The cultural metaphoric method seems superior to the bi-polar method in terms of a detailed, in-depth understanding of a specific culture; ease of use in remembering and using the framework in everyday life; enlargement of the cultural frames of individuals and moving away from a closed system toward an open system; and not masking intra-cultural differences. Readers of this article may disagree with some of these assessments but the discussion thus far should be sufficient to understand how and why the author rated in this fashion. Gelfand and her students compiled a similar comparative list of strengths and weaknesses of each of these two methods (see Gannon, 2001, Exercise 4.8, Debating the Merits of Cultural Metaphors, 55–58; this is also reprinted on Gannon’s website in the location mentioned earlier).

It is important to remember that a cultural metaphor is just a first step in attempting to understand a specific culture. Over time, as the visitor’s experiences increase, he will modify and expand his framework. Osland and Osland (2005/6) have demonstrated that expats who begin to see the host culture in
Gannon: The Cultural Metaphoric Method

terms of paradoxes are more effective. These expats still accept the basic cultural stereotype but modify it based upon their experiences, while their less effective counterparts do not do so. According to Brislin (1993, p. 30), stereotypes are generalizations about a group or class of people that have no place for individual differences. However, Brislin was talking only about one type of stereotyping expressed as a universal syllogism. There are many types of stereotypes. Even though psychologists originally viewed all stereotypes as inaccurate, following Allport’s definition (1954) of a stereotype as that of distorted thinking, over the years they have modified their viewpoint to a belief that sometimes stereotypes are inaccurate, sometimes accurate, and sometimes a combination of accuracy and inaccuracy. The objective is to avoid inaccurate stereotyping completely.

Gannon (1994) explained that cultural metaphors are only probabilistic statements that apply to the cultural group but not every person in it. In this sense cultural metaphors are stereotypes that are not expressed in terms of a universal syllogism. And, as Adler (with Gundersen, 2006) has argued, as long as a person meets the following criteria, it is useful to employ a stereotype, namely that it is: only a first best guess; data based; descriptive and not evaluative; and the person is willing to change the stereotype or cultural metaphor as new data are collected.

Still, there are a number of other issues that need to be explored. Nielsen, Soares, and Machado (under editorial review) and Gannon (2004) have developed different cultural metaphors for Portugal, fado and the Portuguese bullfight. There is no reason for not accepting alternative metaphors, especially if they provide additional insight into a culture. However, the guidelines of grounded theory indicate that eventually each cultural metaphor should be tested empirically. It may well be that each metaphor refines our understanding of Portuguese culture in different ways, or that one of the metaphors is superior to the other. Currently we do not know, as alternative cultural metaphors have been proposed only for Portugal. Further, readers and reviewers of Gannon’s book (and there have been several reviews over the year) have positively reacted to the metaphors he and his colleagues developed and have not suggested alternatives.

Still, the issue of alternative metaphors is valid, and in the seminar we considered several possible cultural metaphors for each nation, based on the information and data collected, before the seminar participants agreed that one metaphor was appropriate for a particular nation. For example, we considered Russia in terms of Mother Russia, the village decision-making decision system whose vestiges can be seen in modern Russia, and vodka consumption. Finally we agreed on Russian ballet, largely because Russia represents a culture torn from its roots several times in its history, and ballet originated outside of Russia; even in the past 70 years, Russia has undergone three such wrenching experiences.

There is also the issue of using insiders and/or outsiders to collect information. Sometimes, when the graduate students developed information about a nation’s culture in the construction of each cultural metaphor, they had been insiders of its culture, having been born and educated in it. At other times, however, outsiders knowledgeable about each culture developed the cultural metaphor, although they interviewed insiders. The important point is not whether they are insiders or outsiders, but that they do not make value-laden or evaluative statements and do not rely upon questionable assumptions about values and practices. To be effective, the writing should be descriptive but non-evaluative. This is a very difficult criterion, and Gannon has had to reject several potential chapters because of it.

Sometimes the author is asked which of the 29 national cultures was the hardest to write about. His answer is that each chapter
is difficult, but the most difficult cultures to write about are the 25 to 30 whose cultural metaphors could not be transported into a readable chapter.

Also, it seems much easier to develop cultural metaphors in a graduate seminar rather than working independently with a few associates, as Nielsen seems to do, and as Gannon has done for a few cultural metaphors as discussed below. When we began work on cultural metaphors, we did not have a model to follow other than trying to identify a cultural metaphor for a specific nation whose specific features would serve as the major subheadings of the chapter. This was critical in Gannon’s thinking about using cultural metaphors. However, it is easier to employ the iterative process associated with cultural metaphors and grounded theory in a seminar than working independently or with one or two other co-authors. The only exceptions that Gannon experienced involved two cross-cultural writers, one a U.S. American who completed her dissertation on Poland (the Polish village church) and the other a U.S. American who has lived in Finland (Finnish sauna) for over 20 years (see Gannon and Pillai, 2009). In general, Gannon’s experiences with working solely with one person outside of the seminar format have been discouraging, sometimes consuming days of work and multiple drafts before Gannon and the potential co-author agree amicably that the chapter will not be finalized.

Another major issue is the degree to which the dimensional and cultural metaphoric methods should be consistent with one another. As indicated in our discussion of the research conducted on cultural metaphors, they do sometimes diverge from one another. There does not need to be a complete overlap of the two methods. Each has advantages and provides insights, but convergence is not the goal. Rather, it is the insight each method provides and the additional questions generated for further exploration that are important.

Thus far cultural metaphors have been developed only for 30 nations. It would be ideal to develop cultural metaphors for the approximately 220 nations in the world, but this is most probably not feasible. Still, there is room for growth. It is somewhat discouraging that there are only 31 cultural metaphors at present, two for Portugal developed separately by Gannon and Nielsen, Soares, and Machado; another one that Nielsen and Mariotto constructed for Argentina; and the other 28 developed by Gannon and his co-authors. And, since Gannon’s graduate seminar ended in 2003, progress has been slow.

Further, a glaring problem is that no one seems to be focusing on developing cultural metaphors for ethnic cultures that exist within one nation or that cross national borders. Less than 10% of the world’s national cultures include primarily one group. Japan is frequently cited as being mono-cultural, although there are approximately 600,000 Koreans living there. This is also a major issue when dimensional researchers use a standard survey to make generalizations about a national culture that has many different ethnic and religious groups. Such generalizations are most probably not valid for all of the many ethnic and religious groups in a national culture. For instance, U.S. Hispanic Americans seem more collectivistic than U.S. White, Anglo Saxon Americans.

There is a paradox relative to cultural metaphors. As indicated earlier, the dominant methodology in cross-cultural management and psychology is that of the bi-polar dimensions. This popularity reflects, at least in some ways, the ease with which researchers can relate the bi-polar dimensions to a large number of variables, such as rates of innovation, economic growth, and even airline accident rates. However, while researchers have not been attracted to the task of creating ethnic and national cultural metaphors, they remain popular, as evidenced by the widespread reading and acceptance of Geertz’s Balinese cockfight and the continuing popu-
larity of Gannon’s book; all or almost all of the many book reviews of various editions of Gannon’s book have been uniformly positive. Similarly, the three-hour workshop on the Argentinean tango given at the 2007 Academy of Management Conference in Anaheim was greeted enthusiastically by the large number of academics in attendance. Why, then, has academic interest in this research stream been so unenthusiastic outside of the researchers discussed in this article?

One possible explanation of this paradox is that it is much easier to complete bi-polar research than cultural metaphoric research, as the bi-polar research relies almost exclusively on one large-scale questionnaire survey administered in several nations. Conversely, grounded theory requires the use of triangulation and saturation, which involve a great commitment of time and energy from the researchers involved. While this is not to denigrate the bi-polar approach, the author maintains that it is far easier to complete publishable research using the bi-polar type of survey than it is using cultural metaphors, especially when its scales can be correlated with other phenomena such as innovation rates and economic growth. Also, the time and energy required not only to develop but also to test cultural metaphors are daunting. For instance, as indicated previously, the first edition of Gannon’s book required six years of work. And, as we have seen, there is only one published study testing the validity of cultural metaphors (Gannon et al, 2005/6). As emphasized above, statistical testing represents the final but essential stage of grounded theory.

Finally, it may well be time to build upon the cross-cultural research thus far but employ new perspectives that will extend our understanding of cultures and related phenomena. Gannon (2008) has argued that globalization has created many cross-cultural paradoxes; he was able to identify 93 such cross-cultural paradoxes in a large number of areas such as motivation, group behavior, interpersonal communication, leadership, language, negotiation, ethics, geography, demography, immigration, religion, economic development, human resource management, and business strategy. Following others, he defines a cross-cultural paradox as a statement containing inconsistent or contradictory elements that seems to be untrue but is in fact true. In this way he sees these paradoxes as ways of understanding how globalization is influencing many areas of activity. These paradoxes represent a viable link between globalization and culture, which influence one another, and provide new insights and a wider range of topics that are normally covered in a cross-cultural course.

In sum, there are strengths and weaknesses associated with any method, and the cultural metaphoric method is no exception. Still, there is much room for completing cultural metaphoric studies both for ethnic and national cultures and even clusters of national cultures and of ethnic cultures spanning two or more nations. And the need to provide education and training to students and managers in the cross-cultural area has never been greater, especially in this area of modern globalization in which the fates of nations are increasingly linked together. For this and other reasons cited in this article, it appears wise for at least some academic attention to be devoted to the creation and use of cultural metaphors both for ethnic and national cultures, along the lines suggested in this article.

References
Brislin, R. (1993) *Understanding Culture’s Influence*


Osland, J. and Osland, A. (2005/6) ‘Expatriate
Résumé

La méthode de la métaphore culturelle : description, analyse et critique (Martin J. Gannon)

Cet article décrit, analyse et critique la méthode de la métaphore culturelle. Il offre aussi une brève comparaison des forces et faiblesses de la méthode bipolaire, ou dimensionnelle, et de la méthode de la métaphore culturelle. Une métaphore culturelle est une activité, un phénomène ou une institution que tous les membres d’une même culture ou d’une même ethnie considèrent important(e) et avec laquelle ils peuvent s’identifier intellectuellement et émotionnellement (Gannon, 2004; Gannon et Pillai, 4ème édition, mai 2009, copyright 2010). Toute métaphore culturelle est dérivée de façon inductive en se servant d’une théorie fondée (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; voir aussi Gannon et Audia, 2000). L’article débute sur une description de la théorie fondée et se poursuit avec une description, une analyse et une critique de la méthode de la métaphore culturelle. Cet article s’intéresse avant tout aux cultures nationales, quoique la méthode puisse être utilisée pour fournir un aperçu des cultures ethniques à l’intérieur et au-delà des nations et d’agglomérats de cultures nationales.

摘要

文化的隐喻法：描述，分析和评论

Martin J. Gannon

本文描述、分析和评论了文化的隐喻法，并简单比较了双段或量纲分析法与文化隐喻法的优缺点。文化隐喻是一个民族或民族文化中所有成员所认同的重要活动、现象或制度。文化隐喻使成员们在智慧行情上相互认同紧密团结。每一个文化隐喻都使用扎根理论进行归纳派生而来。本文首先描述了扎根理论，然后描述了文化隐喻方法，并对其进行分析，就一些重大事件进行了评论。尽管文化隐喻方法可用来为国家内部和国家间的种族文化以及国家文化集群提供真知灼见，但是本文只关注于国家文化。