

# From Theory to Practice: Anthropology in Business Education

Robert Guang Tian<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract:

*Business education has traditionally been seen as more “scientific” and statistically oriented, while the anthropological approach employs more subjective and qualitative methods. These methods can be invaluable for business researchers in a number of contexts in terms of corporate culture, consumer behavior, and product design. In recent years, anthropological (or anthropologically inspired) research procedures have become increasingly prominent within business and have thus engendered some influences on business education. In this paper, the nature and application of these anthropological tools are discussed as well as suggestions regarding how to introduce such ideas into business education practice.*

**Key Words:** *Anthropology, Business, Consumer, Culture, Education*

## Introduction

Business educators are charged with graduating students who are well grounded in basic business principles, able to adapt, learn, and contribute to a variety of business settings, and possess reasonable communication and problem-solving skills. Both public and private organizations look to business schools to provide students with skills that match the current needs of the marketplace. However in today’s business environment, characterized by hyper-competition and rapid technological change, marketplace requirements are a constantly moving target. Therefore, it is essential that business educators constantly update their curriculum and re-evaluate their pedagogical approaches. Different business schools may encourage faculty to adopt different approaches. An anthropological approach to consumer behavior is one such teaching method that has been employed in business education in recent years (Emery, Kramer, Tian 2001; Tian 2001).

Moreover, business education is not designed simply to teach students how to manage technology and materials, but to demonstrate to students how they might recast their organizational structure and human resources to gain a competitive advantage (Shapiro 2003). Clearly, behavioral science plays an important role in business education; it has been well known and documented for years that the behavioral side of marketing and management have their roots in psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology. In business practice, anthropology as a behavioral science has been treated as a related field and has made significant contributions in consumer studies and new-product design (Jordan 2003); however, in business education, although anthropology’s influence has kept growing, it has not been largely or widely

adopted by business educators in their teaching practices (Tian 2002).

In light of previous research on business anthropology, this paper further probes the possibilities and means by which anthropology can be applied to business education practices by reviewing and discussing the relation between business education and anthropology; by displaying and discussing successful anthropological practices in business with a focus on consumer studies in anthropology; and by examining possible solutions and means by which to apply the anthropological approach in contemporary business education, particularly in consumer behavior studies.

## Business Education and Business Anthropology

The fundamental objective of business education is to provide instruction for and about business. Students learn the basics of personal or corporate finance, develop techniques for making wise consumer decisions, master economic principles, and learn how to operate and manage businesses. In addition, business educators play a prominent role in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for students to succeed in future employment. Further, business education courses provide the impetus for students to successfully complete college programs in one of several business areas. In other words, business education in the end is for and about business in terms of education; it is by no means a business of education but a delivery of knowledge from instructors to students.

There are many different areas in business education, such as management, accounting, marketing, financing, management information system,

international business, small-business development, and so on. In each of these areas are different subjects; for example, in the marketing area there are subjects of marketing principles, service marketing, business-to-business marketing, sales management, advertising and promotion, competitive intelligence, logistics and distribution channels, and consumer behavior (Emery and Tian 2003). Taking marketing as an example, a marketing instructor teaching consumer behavior, like teaching almost any other marketing course, assigns new terms or terminologies to unfamiliar theoretical frameworks and concepts. Professors break down the subject matter into a number of relatively distinct sub-areas for study, such as consumer psychology, consumer purchasing, consumer consumption, and reference groups. Exploration of each of the component parts allows the student to develop an understanding of each of these areas deemed important to an overall understanding of consumer behavior.

The multifaceted discipline of business education includes subject matter areas which focus on the functional areas of business (management, marketing, finance, accounting, entrepreneurship), on factors which affect business (economics, international business, business law), on basic skills (computation and communication), and on examining business from different perspectives. Students typically have problems understanding the conceptual linkages between their textbooks and the real business world, but business practitioners believe these linkages could be used to create the business's competitive advantage (Porter 1980). As such, business supervisors expect their employees to take a systems approach to problem solving, which is the principle that business educators need to emphasize in their students' learning processes (Emery 2002). Moreover, business requires that higher education facilitates learning by using more practitioner-oriented exercises to help students understand the linkages and interactions among various concepts (Oblinger and Verville 1998).

Apparently, business education is to provide qualified business staff to the business world by professional educational institutions. Anthropology is a social science that studies human kinds and their social environments. For many people, anthropology refers to culture, ethnic, groups, tribes, or even mummies. However, this opinion may not be entirely accurate since anthropological studies have moved to more contemporary problems, such as urban life, ethnic conflicts, and postmodernism (Armansyah 2003). More recently, many anthropologists have argued that

anthropology can be applied to cope with the everyday world such as business, and that the fundamental methodology of ethnography for anthropology is a powerfully applicable tool in the business world in terms of observation, interview, analysis of events, analyzing relationships, semiotic analysis, as well as multiple techniques and rapid assessment (Jordan 2003).

Ethnography is the process of describing a culture. The objective of ethnography is to discover as much as possible about every aspect of culture. McCurdy (1997) states that ethnography can be utilized to observe working activities that most employees consider to be within a "honeymoon period." Managers are often given a grace period when they are new on their job. Usually the period only lasts a month or two. To illustrate how ethnography can be applied in business, McCurdy presents the real experience of anthropologist Susan Stanton, a newly appointed manager in a company called UTC. Stanton applies an ethnographic approach to observe her subordinates' work activities and adjusts her managerial activities accordingly. From the ethnographic research that she has conducted, Stanton discovered that there were problems with warehouse inventory not matching what was originally ordered, or sometimes she discovered that goods were not in good condition. It was fortunate that she had conducted the ethnographic research; otherwise she might have difficulties finding the best solutions to solve the problems (McCurdy 1997).

Another powerful implication of anthropology in business is its tradition of culture studies. There are many definitions of culture; however, the one most cited by business scholars is one that Harris and Moran (1987) defined. According to them, culture gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing. It provides a learned, shared, and interrelated set of symbols, codes, and values that direct and justify human behavior. In marketing and consumer behavior research the use of this concept has been minimal; marketers and consumers commonly ignore the depth of this concept and its implications for the analysis of human behavior. However, its underlying impact on marketing is very observable (Douglas and Craig 1995; Griffith and Ryans 1995).

In anthropology, culture as a concept is regularly used to describe and analyze the varieties and generalities of human behavior, values, choices, preferences, practices, beliefs, attitudes, and so forth throughout the world (Costa 1995). According to classical anthropological theory, culture is an

underlying dimension of all societies. The creation and sharing of cultural beliefs and values is an integral part of being human. All human behavior, including consumption behavior, takes place within a cultural context (Harris and Moran 1987). Indeed, it is culture that makes people's social and economic lives possible. Therefore, the culture concept is as relevant to understanding the beliefs and behavior of social groups within a complex capitalism society as it is to studying people in pre-capitalistic small and remote villages.

Baba and Batteau (2003) indicate that since the 1930s cultural anthropologists have conducted a large amount of research in industrial and corporate settings, focusing largely on corporate cultures in the U.S. For example, the human-relations school of organizational research of the 1930s and 1940s produced a number of ethnographies showing how informal cultural patterns could influence managerial goals. More recent studies of corporate cultures have attempted to show how specific configurations of values contribute to the relative success or failure of meeting corporate goals. It is indicated that work in and for business has traditionally been a part of anthropology. Through the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the field of anthropology has been growing in business studies (Jordan 2003). With their traditional emphasis on participant observation, business anthropologists are in a unique position to gather information on grass-roots corporate culture from the bottom up.

To illustrate, the Xerox Corporation used an anthropologist to help the company devise more effective training programs for their service technicians. Julian Orr, the anthropologist assigned to the project, took the training and went on service calls himself in order to study firsthand the process of repairing the copy machines. This highly experiential approach to data gathering revealed that the main problem was not in repairing the machine but rather in teaching people how to use it. Orr found that a large percentage of service calls were not to fix disabled hardware but to show employees how to run the machine. That single insight gained through firsthand participant observation enabled Xerox to restructure its training programs for service technicians by placing more emphasis on teaching and customer relations (Baba and Batteau 2003).

More recently, to reflect the applicability of anthropology in business practice, anthropologists together with their business colleagues created and developed a sub-field in anthropology termed "business anthropology" (Jordan 2003). Business

anthropology is defined as anthropological practice that applies the theories and methods of the discipline to the problem-solving activity in private sector organizations, especially industrial firms. Recent research efforts in business anthropology have been concentrated in three broad areas: marketing and consumer behavior; organizational theory and culture; and international business, especially international marketing, intercultural management, and intercultural communication (Baba and Batteau 2003). Business anthropology began in the early 1980s when applied-anthropology legends Lucy Suchman and Julian Orr came to Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center to study how people interacted with technology. Since then, anthropologists, psychologists, and other social scientists have dropped their curricula vitae for resumes and infiltrated the corporate world, calling themselves "knowledge liaisons," "ethnographers," and "evaluators." The influx has grown in recent years as companies have tried to get more tactical about consumer research, evaluating technological products before their release (Walsh 2001).

In practice, business anthropologists study almost everything from marketing strategies to the corporate climate, applying traditional anthropological methods of research and observation to understanding and reflecting business culture and thus make their contributions to business development. For instance, to Toronto-based Dr. Barac, who teaches social anthropology at the University of Toronto, business anthropology means that no two working days are the same. His first corporate job arose from a conversation at a cocktail party, when he was asked to troubleshoot for an advertising agency looking to keep Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company as a client. What he discovered in studying the insurance giant was that its advertising campaign was outdated, still relying on the image of the old Wild Kingdom television show, even though young customers were not familiar with the program. By explaining how the company was not being true to itself, he was able to help the advertising agency change its campaign and keep a significant customer. More recently, he completed a job for the Canadian film industry. That entailed hanging around movie theaters observing everything from the behavior of customers at the food court to what posters drew people's attention to interviewing patrons about their attitudes and experiences (Mulroney 2002)

Baba and Batteau, among others, are anthropologists who have successfully integrated anthropology with business education by offering business anthropology courses at Wayne State University (Baba and Batteau 2003). According to

them, research has shown that failures in the international business settings frequently result more from an inability to understand and adapt to foreign ways of thinking and acting rather than from technical or professional incompetence. A healthy cooperation between business anthropologists and members of the international business community will be an important step in achieving better understanding of cultural factors in business. Business history has witnessed that failure to consider the cultural context in the domestic organization has led to misunderstandings, miscommunication, lawsuits, and generally an undermining of the goals of organization. Therefore, it is clear that a company's need to be aware of cultural environments becomes even more critical when moving into the area of international business. Here the magnitude of the cultural differences is vastly greater; consequently, breakdowns of communications usually increase geometrically. Although the anthropological perspective is valuable in understanding any business organization, whether it is domestic or international business, anthropologists are experts on the patterned aspects of group behavior (Bennett 1954), and thus they mainly focus on contributions that business anthropology can make to improve business operations (Baba and Batteau 2003).

Apparently, the successful practices of business anthropologists make it possible to apply anthropology in business education. In fact, as Jordan observed, since the 1980s anthropology's influence on business schools has grown. Anthropologists teaching in business schools have played an important role in the development of consumer studies in business education, such as Grant McCracken and Jerry Saltman at Harvard, John Sherry at Northwestern, Eric Arnould at Nebraska, Barbara Olsen at State University of New York-Old Westbury, Janeen Costa at Utah, and Annamma Joy at Concordia. On the other hand, business faculty like Ron Hill and Carol Kaufman-Scarborough, who received their training from business schools, are applying ethnography methodology in their business research (Jordan 2003).

### **Consumer Science and Anthropologists**

For anthropologists, marketing and consumption are crucial forces on human behavior worldwide; understanding these forces is a key element in understanding political economy and world systems. "Anthropologists view consumer behavior in a cultural, historical, and global context" (Jordan 2003:64). Richins stresses the significance of consumer behavior in his President's Address to the 2000 Annual Conference of Association for Consumer Research; he further points

out that consumer behavior is compelling to everyone. Consumer behavior is a social science. Accordingly, there are a few aspects which make consumer behavior important for social scientists.

First, consumption is important to economic performance; workers' desires to consume often increase their work motivation and employee productivity. In the aggregate, consumption-related factors such as spending, saving, and consumer confidence have important impacts on cash flows, employment rates, and capital investments. Second, consumption is necessary for individuals' health and well-being, because many consumption experiences are associated with delight and joy, some with disappointment or anger; deficits in individuals' ability to consume over a long period of time, or in a large portion of a population subgroup, are often associated with property crime, hopelessness, and so on. Third, many pressing social problems are related to consumer behavior gone awry, for example, inappropriate consumption of drugs, alcohol, and firearms can have devastating impacts on individuals and families, while improper use of cell phones may cause traffic accidents. Lastly but not finally, consumption is an important topic in everyday interpersonal discourse; it influences what people talk about, such as exchanging shopping experiences with co-workers or discussing the movie just seen or new restaurant recently tried. Also, consumption influences how individuals interact with others. It may serve as a source of conflict, such as when spouses disagree over what to buy or when children badger their parents for more things, more expensive things, or simply things their parents don't want them to have. In short, consumption is about the way people live (Richins 2000).

Although consumer behavior is a social science, many consumer scholars have failed to treat it as such. Instead of looking at consumers in social systems and involved in social relationships, they have focused primarily on the individual. In fact, consumer behavior textbooks routinely acknowledge the importance of social and cultural aspects, allocating large sections to them (Belk 1987; Lutz 1991; Zaltman 1991), but despite occasional pleas to take a larger, more social view of consumer behavior, consumer scholars have failed to do so (Richins, 2000). Social science is the study of society and human relationships (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 1994) and deals with human behavior in its social and cultural aspects. Nicosia and Mayer (1976) encouraged scholars to treat consumer behavior as a social science, particularly urging consumer scholars to examine the influence of cultural values, institutions and their norms, and consumption

activities as they relate to the network of social and cultural relationships.

Clearly, what the consumer scientists Nicosia and Mayer, as well as Richins encouraged is really what modern business anthropologists are doing. While in the earlier stages of the discipline the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead made her capstone study on the indigenous peoples of Samoa; another famous anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, ventured into the Amazon rain forests to observe disappearing Native traditions. In the modern world of consumer marketing, however, new kinds of tribes are emerging all the time. As journalist Gene Koprowskj (1999) indicates, commercially viable subcultures exist everywhere from online chat rooms to convenience stores, ripe for trained social scientists to analyze them and relay their purchasing preferences to marketers. Like the pilot anthropologists Mead and Lévi-Strauss, contemporary business anthropologists are trekking to their fields, now armed with video cameras, tape recorders, and pagers. They track the tribal buying rituals of consumers and help corporate decision-makers craft marketing strategies that connect with them on a primitive, almost subliminal, level.

For example, Rick Robinson is one of this new breed of business anthropologists. After getting a taste of the way marketers approach niche development at the Chicago-based Doblin Group, Robinson set off to form his own company, E-Lab. At E-Lab, Robinson and his colleagues use anthropological methods to observe the consumption process, and the results are extremely helpful in terms of designing new products. As Robinson noted, every consumer behavior has a particular framework and a theory that is based upon ideas, beliefs, and attitudes which all come from somewhere. The job of E-Lab is to find the meaningful consumption patterns which exist in the marketplace. They do not ask customers what they want; instead, they watch what consumers do. For example, they facilitated designing a new over-the-counter cold medicine by studying the process of how people get sick; they helped create a new station wagon for a major car maker, led backpack maker JanSport to design a completely new way of displaying its products in sporting goods stores, and they led to new market segmentations for Frito-Lay which changed the way the company marketed the products in stores according to their findings about consumer behaviors (Koprowskj 1999).

Journalist Mulrone (2002) comments that one of the most obvious applications of anthropology to the business world, and perhaps the best known, is the

study of consumer behavior in retail sales. Katherine S. Newman (1993), a business anthropologist, has examined the effects of economic decline on consumption patterns, lifestyle, and family relationships. Anthropologist Paco Underhill (2000) detailed consumer behavior in retail world in his book *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*, explaining why consumers might go into a store for one thing and end up buying another, or what kind of store atmosphere is most effective for influencing shopping behavior. Anthropologist Grant McCracken (1990), in his oft-cited book *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, examined the origins and development of the consumer society. He further analyzed theoretical models that attempt to relate culture and consumption. In the book, McCracken demonstrates how consumers use the meaning of consuming goods to fashion and sustain certain hopes, maintain life-styles, and manage change. This critical anthropological examination of relevant contemporary literature is a stimulating addition to knowledge and theory about the interrelationship of culture and consumption. For McCracken, consumption is broadly defined to include the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought, and used, while culture is defined as those ideas and activities with which consumers construe and construct the world. According to McCracken, the relationship between culture and consumption is one of intense mutuality reflected in three contexts: history, theory, and practice.

Richard Bierck (2001) examined research by HBS professor Gerald Zaltman and consumer science consultant Paco Underhill on how to understand what customers (users) think. This research indicates that quantifying and analyzing what consumers do may not lead managers to really understand consumers, but qualitative and observational data can serve that purpose and meet managers' needs. Bierck's article was printed in the *Harvard Business School Working Knowledge Journal*. Later, an article by Jennifer McFarland (2001), which also appeared in the *Harvard Business School Working Knowledge Journal*, explains how to help understand the user via a consumer anthropologist. In the article, McFarland indicates when a new product needs testing for consumer reaction; companies traditionally turn to that old market-research mainstay, the focus group. However, alternative techniques offer deeper insights that can inform the product development cycle like never before. Ethnographic market research is increasingly being used to provide new information about consumers. Using the anthropologist's tool kit

of methods and theories, ethnographers are giving corporations an inside look at the cultural trends, attitudes, and lifestyle factors that influence consumer decisions about everything from bathtubs and toothpaste to insurance and batteries.

Consumer anthropologists do not look for opinions but for a 360-degree understanding of how a product might resonate within the consumer's daily life. For example, Whirlpool recently asked Romeo, an in-house anthropologist at the company, to conduct a study for a line of luxury jetted bathtubs. Using a sample of 15 families from four different markets, the methodologically thorough Romeo conducted in-home interviews and even filmed participants (who were wearing bathing suits) while they soaked. She also asked them to respond to questions such as "When you think of your tub, what images come to mind?" by creating a journal of images – photos participants took themselves or ones they cut out of magazines – that came to mind. What emerged was a consumer picture of bathing as a transformative experience to Romeo. As she put it: "It's like getting in touch with the divine for 15 minutes. Those leanings – the emotional, cultural, symbolic meanings – are quite powerful." They also validated Whirlpool's working concept for the luxury tub. Prior to Romeo's research, the tub had been christened "Cielo," meaning "celestial" or "heavenly" in Italian and Spanish – an image that the study participants often called upon to describe their bathing experience.

According to McFarland's report, the real power of ethnography lies at the front end of product development. The principle methodology for consumer anthropologists is inductive rather than deductive. As one consumer anthropologist who has been interviewed by McFarland says: "Part of the idea of going into peoples' homes or wherever it is that a product is important is that you're discovering from them what the meaningful categories are." Toothpaste marketing, for example, used to be about fighting cavities and whitening teeth. But ethnographic research found that consumers' concept and concerns had changed. People are really concerned with gums, their tongue – the whole mouth – when they are putting the toothbrush in their mouth; it's not just cavities that interest them anymore. Toothpastes such as Colgate Total, which purports to "continue to work even after you stop brushing," are designed to appeal to this broader concept of dental care. Just as Richard Lacayo (2001) indicated, "consumer anthropology takes the time to really understand the how and why consumers use products."

For the anthropologist, consumer behavior is a social science as well as a subject for business; constantly changing consumer behaviors provide great challenges and opportunities to anthropologists. In the field of consumer behavior anthropologists do everything from studying consumers in their natural habitats (the home, usually) to advising industrial design teams. Marketing involves targeting an audience for a product and then selling it, while anthropologists are responsible for finding out how the product will be used. By recording in excruciating detail how people live and how products fit into their lives, anthropologists learn much more than what consumers usually tell marketers, since interviewees often lie on surveys or say what they think they should. Anthropologists are now turning up on more and more company payrolls alongside accountants and analysts. Much to the ire of their academic colleagues, companies are snapping up doctoral candidates, who once competed for a shrinking pie of academic slots and research grants, before they can finish their dissertations. Graduates are eschewing New Guinea and Bora Bora for Motorola and Intel (Walsh 2001).

#### **Implication of Anthropology in Business Education**

Education for business is aimed at fostering knowledgeable, qualified future business-oriented professionals. It is important that business educators integrate updated skills and knowledge into business education curricula. The late 1990s proved to be the beginning of the most exciting and opportunistic years in the history of the business world. Mass marketing as we know it is "out" and customized marketing has become more and more important since we have entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is clear that business professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will need to face more challenges than ever before in terms of electronic business, global business, and cross-cultural business. At the same time, these challenges provide more opportunities for business professionals in practices from management to marketing.

These types of challenges are the most-discussed topics in the business area theoretically and practically; they will generate certain impacts and influences on business areas and directions, as well as on business education. Although business education consists of various contents, to teach students to understand consumers and consumption patterns is the core issue in business education. In the previous discussion we outlined an anthropological approach to understand consumer behaviors, namely by using anthropological methodology to study consumers and their behaviors.

There is no doubt that anthropologists have contributed some valuable methods as well as theoretical perspectives to the business world, particularly in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior, by providing a good understanding of human cultures and their meanings to business. In addition, anthropologists' research in this area contributes to business science in the focus on modes of consumption, which is equally as important as the focus on modes of production and the social life of commodities (Jordan 2003). It is clear that the anthropological approach in business practice is much more successful than was originally expected. Now the question is: can we further apply the anthropological approach in business education? If so, then the next question will be: how should we apply the anthropological approach in our business education practice?

The objective of business educators is to effectively assist students' learning of business concepts, theories, and practices. However, recent studies suggest that undergraduate business education needs to be more effective; in an effort to ascertain the most effective methods for teaching, business schools across the country are experimenting with a variety of innovative techniques. While scholars may differ in their opinions of which methods are most effective, the majority agree that the traditional lecture format is, perhaps, the least effective way of teaching and learning. In recent years the use of experiential techniques, such as cooperative experiential learning projects, has received a significant amount of attention in business education (Bobbitt et al. 2000). On the other hand, business schools are often accused of focusing too much on quantitative and technical skills and spending too little energy on interpersonal and communication skills (Gremier et al. 2000). An anthropological approach to business education is suggested to be an effective vehicle for addressing the above concerns and is particularly well suited for consumer-behavior courses (Tian 2001).

The application of the anthropological approach to business education is by no means new, but it is still under development. In fact, as stated above, one will not be surprised to find many anthropologists teaching business courses at leading business schools such as the Harvard Business School (HBS) and the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Meanwhile, many anthropology departments at state universities offer business courses, such as the anthropology departments at Wayne State University and Oregon State University. In fact, due to wide applications of anthropology in business and the

increased demand for business anthropologists, more and more colleges and universities are now looking for anthropology professors with business experience to help train what they are euphemistically calling "practicing anthropologists" for the future business world domestically and internationally (Walsh 2001).

Therefore, it is necessary for business faculty to consider adopting anthropological methodologies and theoretic frames in their educational practice; meanwhile, the anthropological faculty should consider integrating more business-oriented courses into their curricula. Currently, it is recommended that business anthropology as a core course be added into existing business education curricula, and business faculties are encouraged to actively recruit instructors with anthropological training who also have strong business experiences and backgrounds to enlarge the scope of the business program. More anthropological business courses can be developed in terms of consumer behaviors, product design, corporation cultures, organizational behavior, and so on. It is needless to point out that, as in many other educational areas, there will not be a cookbook for business educators to refer to in terms of applying anthropological methodologies and theoretic frames in their course design and development; however, based on the inventory of those who have successfully applied an anthropological approach in business education, as well as the author's own accumulated experiences, there are a few points that may highlight the issues concerned.

The first point is to integrate ethnographic skills in teaching practice, which means to teach students to use ethnographic skills such as participant-observation and long interviews, and to observe and study consumers and their consumption behaviors or patterns. The largest part of a business anthropologist's work is marked by the use of ethnographic methods and the holistic perspective. Human behavior must always be studied in its social and cultural context; to find what consumers want, one must both ask and observe them. This anthropological selling point has been widely accepted by business organizations; in the real business world, more and more companies have begun to apply these practical methods on being aware of the uniqueness of the anthropological input to business and the usefulness of ethnographic research. However, it is important to let students understand the differences between a real ethnographic work and a short-term consumer-behavior research project that is conducted by using ethnographic techniques.

The second point involves the interactions between the instructor and the students. Students by no means will understand, nor be able to use, anthropological skills by themselves in a short period. It is highly advised that before sending students out for participant-observation and long interviews, it is better to let them conduct the observation practices and long interviews in the classroom. Instructors should demonstrate how to conduct interviews and observations; also it is crucial that the instructors make all possible efforts to join with the students in their field work and to provide necessary advice on-site. Students should be advised that the data collected and the method of data collection are equally important.

The third point relates to the field of work ethics; it is necessary to let students know that by no means should they cook data for their project purpose; also it is important to let students understand that by no means should they do anything that may hurt the people they study. Although most college students are mature enough to know what is right or wrong, in reality there might be a few who cannot or at least do not want to distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, the instructors must clearly introduce the ethical codes written by, for example, the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), and the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA). These professional ethics codes establish a valuable set of criteria for all business anthropologists, including the students who are learning to do business anthropology, to follow. Violation of the ethical codes could be a serious problem for any one who is involved in and affiliated with unethical behaviors.

The fourth point is about the most popular and important theoretical issues in anthropological studies; it is important to let students understand that there are certain issues or concepts that make anthropological works more valuable, such as the influence of family, kinship, gender, and friendship on consumer behaviors, the possible effects of broad cultural patterns, cultural awareness, cross-cultural communications, and conflicts on consumer behaviors. It is necessary to let the students know that the unique anthropological contribution to the business world is understanding consumers in terms of contested, overlapping, and intertwined cultural groupings; of consumption as action that voices acceptance and resistance; of the global as re-created in the local; and of identity as it is negotiated through consumptive practices (Jordan 2003).

The fifth point deals with the presentation and

analysis of data collected from fieldwork. Students should be instructed that without proper analysis, the data collected will be meaningless. They should be encouraged to conduct analysis of events, analysis of relationships, and so on within the social and cultural context in which the data is collected. Students should also be instructed in how to effectively present the findings. The author's experience indicates that students tend to present the data in their reports with inadequate data processing; they also tend to make extensive descriptive presentations but fewer analytical presentations in their research reports. It is important to let students understand at the start that anthropological study is descriptive in the beginning but leads to a comparative and critical analysis; to conduct a meaningful analysis they need to selectively present data, to make comparisons between the ideal and the real, between the formal and the informal, between one place and another, between one category of consumers from the other, and so on. It will be very helpful to the students that the instructor provide some previous high-quality student work; the author's experience suggests that students often learn more by reading and evaluating their peers' works.

## Conclusion

There are more points that are important in terms of applying the anthropological approach to business education; however the author will not list them all at this time. It is expected that such a practicable and effective teaching and learning approach can draw more attention from business education colleagues. Moreover, it is the author's expectation that since the business world demands more and more well-trained business anthropologists, business educators and business anthropologists should work together to push the anthropological approach in business education. The author believes that in the near future a totally new kind of MBA (Master of Business Anthropology) program will be established at most business schools and become one of the most preferred business degrees in the future. Finally, it is important to point out that this paper has a very limited scope in that the author only set out to further explore why and how the anthropological approach can be applied in business education in line with previous studies in the field. Anthropology can provide new methods, new inputs for restructuring established approaches and procedures at business schools, and in the end can broaden the world-view of business educators.

Business education functions as a bridge that leads business students to the real business world by



enhancing their ability to cope with increased specialization and job mobility. Advances in technology open the doors for business expansion and facilitate the creation of complex organizations. It is in this world that anthropological techniques play a distinctive role. Today, anthropology has gained a meaningful reputation within business research in general, and consumer research, in particular. As a result, anthropological methods increasingly need to be dealt with in greater detail in college courses, such as consumer behavior and marketing research.

The influences of anthropology on business education have been identified and recognized since the late 1980s. Although qualitative methods, such as humanistic and qualitative social scientific techniques, have long been taught within business schools, the current shift toward anthropology is destined to give these tools a higher profile. As a result of this growing trend, consumer behavior and marketing research instructors increasingly need to develop their courses around qualitative methods such as those of anthropology and ethnography. Although this paper provides valuable resources as this process progresses, more theoretical research and new educational practices are expected in the near future.

#### Notes

1. Dr. Robert Guang Tian is Associate Professor of Business Administration at Medaille College, New York. The author would like to thank Dr. Dan Trotter of Coker College, for proofreading.

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