

We humans like to believe that our own species is above the rest of the animal kingdom. After all, we feel emotions, have politics and social classes, and form meaningful and complex relationships, three things that many people believe are not possible for the rest of the organisms on Earth. However, *Monkey Kingdom* from Disney Nature proves that this sentiment is not as cut and dry as it seems. This documentary follows Maya, a toque macaque monkey as she goes through various ups and downs to rise to the top of the social hierarchy in her troop. Throughout the film, many connections are made between the behaviours of wild chimpanzees and humans that are very intriguing from an anthropological standpoint. Many parallels can be drawn between chimpanzees and humans through their similarities in social structures, emotions, and traditions.

Chimpanzee troops, especially those comprised of toque macaques, have social structures with higher and lower class individuals that enjoy different rights. Maya, being born at the bottom of the social ladder, does not enjoy the same privileges that the alpha male and the queens of the troop have accepted as rights. These higher-class monkeys enjoy things like special spots in fig trees and first pickings in food, while Maya must sleep on the ground below the tree and scrounge around for food in unique and possibly dangerous locations to stay alive and nourished. Although the term “social structure” is quite obsolete and outdated as cultures have mixed and the world has become more of an equal society than ever seen before, this term does apply to many human societies in history. In fact, this monkey society can very easily be compared to the social structure of Mainland China in the Qing dynasty. During this time, there was a very visible class divide with the emperor and his associates enjoying the fruits of the labour of the whole population while fixing the system in such a way that it was almost impossible for the lower class to climb the social hierarchy. When born into a low class, a citizen

in this society could do nothing but make the best of their bad situation and attempt to live on whatever they could, just as Maya is shown doing in the film. This shows how both humans and chimpanzees operate based on the same basic social class system.

Humans are not the only species with the ability to process and express complex emotions, as the toque macaques are also capable of this feat. This can be seen through Kumar's interactions with the rest of the troop. Initially, when Kumar mated with Maya, Raja and the other monkeys in the troop were very angry at Kumar, showing their anger through physical means and pushing him out of the troop. However, when Kumar made his return, he made sure to garner affection from the higher-class monkeys. Through grooming and sharing food, Kumar built strong bonds with Raja and his subordinates, leading to them showing affection and respect towards him and following his lead when fighting the enemy troop. Also, at the end of this battle, one monkey is found dead, and all of the monkeys in the troop gather around his body silently to mourn. This shows that the macaques have a clear understanding of the emotions that humans show on a daily basis and are capable of expressing them just like their more advanced primate relatives do.

Although it may seem at first glance that the chimpanzees do not live a complex life, these monkeys can be seen observing traditions and acting according to the notions of their cultures. During her research in Gombe, Jane Goodall concluded that chimpanzees do in fact exhibit signs of having culture, including showing differences in rituals, grooming, tool use, and net building between different tribes (Brunette, 2018). Although this documentary only focuses on the life of one troop, it is shown that these monkeys act on a preexisting culture system which includes things like the courting season where Kumar and Maya met, the monsoon season with the whole tribe catching insects, and the splitting of jackfruit between specific troop members

during jackfruit season. Although these events do not contain as much nuance as some aspects of human culture including holidays and family traditions, it does show that these chimpanzees are capable of intergenerational social learning, forming different customs in different troops, and forming and adhering to culture as a whole.

In conclusion, based on their tendency to act based on a predetermined social structure, their ability to feel and process complex emotions, and their distinct cultures, it is undeniable that chimpanzees are more connected to humans than any other animal family. With this knowledge in mind, it is easy to understand how the theory arose that humans and chimpanzees shared a common ancestor.

## References

Brunette, M. (2018, April 11). Do chimpanzees have culture? Jane Goodall Institute. Retrieved November 27, 2022, from <https://janegoodall.ca/our-stories/do-chimpanzees-have-culture/#:~:text=These%20behaviours%20include%20differences%20in,communities%20while%20absent%20in%20others.>