Anthropology 104



# **Fieldwork Project 1** | *Commodity Chain Analysis*

Project Journal

**Name: Svadrut Kukunooru**

**TA Name: Juniper Lewis**

**Discussion Section Number: 320**

**Semester and Year: 2nd semester, 1st year**

# Getting Started

Welcome to your journal assignments for Fieldwork Project 1! Please add your information to this template (above), rename and save it in Microsoft Word **.docx** or **.doc** format.

Make sure the filename includes **your name** and the **name of the assignment** (FWP1).

*(Example)* FWP1 Wendy Liu.docx

*Submission:* The project journal will be completed in several steps. You will be submitting this same journal file multiple times in different stages of writing, in response to each journal assignment below. If you do not submit the file to Canvas by the deadline you will not be awarded points for that journal assignment. For the first assignment you are only expected to complete Journal 1.1 (the others will still be blank). By the end of the project, all the assignments in your journal will be filled in.

## **Journal 1.1** | Reading Response

### Instructions & Expectations

Before you begin this writing assignment:

* Read the article **“How Sushi Went Global” by Theodore Besto**r. *Download PDF from Canvas.*
* Watch the **NPR video series “Planet Money Makes A T-Shirt”.** *Follow links on Canvas.*

Write 2-4 sentences in response to each of the question below. The first question has been completed as an example.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 3**.

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| --- |
| *(Example)* **How has the demand for tuna changed over time?** |
| Tuna has been a popular food in Japan for centuries. Today, millions of pounds of it are sold every day in Tokyo’s wholesale seafood market. In North America, sushi was a largely unheard during the early 20th century, but during late 20th century it became a trendy food in American cities, as well as in Europe and Latin America. Consuming sushi became a sign of class status, education, and taste, and so the demand for tuna grew and the price per pound became very high. |
| 1. **Describe the locations, technologies, and workers involved in producing tuna for sushi restaurants.** |
| The tuna fishing process stretches halfway across the world and involves countless employees, from tuna fishermen, to auctioneers, to scientists, and much more. Tuna fishing is usually done in the Atlantic, off the coast of Maine as well as in the Mediterranean. Fishermen use differing techniques to catch tuna as well – American fishermen use smaller boats and a more old-fashioned method, just a fisherman fighting with a tuna on a special heavy-duty fishing rod. However, Europeans use more complicated strategies, such as gigantic nets to catch the tuna in their migration, raise them, and sell them in Tokyo. |
| 1. **How does the fact that tuna is sold internationally effect fishers’ livelihoods?** |
| Since the fishing market is so global, a price change in Tsukiji, the worlds’ premier tuna fish market located in Japan, can affect the livelihood of a simple fishermen from Massachusetts. Additionally, mistakes such as exporting too many fish at the same time can dramatically lower prices, affecting livelihoods everywhere. |
| 1. **Describe the locations, technologies, and workers involved in making a t-shirt.** |
| There are many locations involved in making a T-shirt. First, cotton is grown in plantations in the southern U.S. where it is harvested by advanced technology such as John Deere pickers and tractors. Then, the cotton is shipped to Bangladesh or Indonesia, where machines spin the cotton into ropes and the ropes into fabric. Next, workers in places like Bangladesh or Colombia, working one of the lowest wages in the world, sew the t-shirt. The shirt is put in a shipping container and shipped to Miami, where it is distributed to retailers. |
| 1. **Describe some of the differences between working at a t-shirt factory in Bangladesh versus Columbia.** |
| The garment industry in Bangladesh is the main drive of the economy; in other words, if the garment industry collapsed, the country, already on its last legs, would collapse as well. However, in Colombia, the garment industry is just that – an industry. Colombian workers can make a livable wage, with enough so that food, water, and electricity isn’t a big worry. |
| 1. **What did you find most interesting, important, and/or confusing about the article and the video series?** |
| What I found the most interesting about the article and video series is how many steps are involved to get a product from raw materials to our door. The intersection of so many different people and industries, just for a single product, was riveting. It made me realize how sophisticated globalization has made the world economy, compared to a hundred years ago. |
| 1. **What have you learned from the article and the video series that may be useful to you when you conduct a commodity chain study yourself?** |
| The article and the video series taught me that I should try my hardest not to overlook a step. In the video series, I thought they would start with cotton, but instead they began with the genetically modified cotton seeds grown in a lab in Wisconsin. In the article, I thought it would be a simple transaction – fishermen to market; but there were so many more people involved than I thought there would be. I should try not to overlook this, in the case I do a commodity chain study. |

## **Journal 1.2** | Commodity Choice

### Instructions & Expectations

You are going to do your own commodity chain analysis about one of the types of commodities from the list below. During your discussion section, you should have started thinking about which type of commodity will be most interesting for you to research.

* chocolate bar
* smart phone
* pair of sneakers

After you have selected the type of commodity, pick a specific brand of that commodity (e.g. a Hershey’s chocolate bar, a pair of Nike sneakers, etc.). Make sure to choose a specific brand that, based on your preliminary research in discussion section, appears to have relevant sources about its production available online.

Remember:

* Choose a commodity that will be interesting for you to explore.
* Choose a commodity that, based on your preliminary research, appears to have enough relevant sources.

### Task

Based on the work you did in discussion section, write down your choice of commodity, the specific brand, and a brief explanation of why you chose it in the space provided below. Your TA will review these and advise you which one(s) likely to be successful for your research.

**Please review your TA’s feedback on Canvas before proceeding with your project.**

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day AFTER your Discussion Section in Week 3** (e.g. if your discussion section meets on Monday, your Research Questions are due by 11:59pm on Tuesday).

### Commodity Choice

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Type of commodity** | Smartphone |
| **Brand of commodity** | Apple |
| **Why did you choose this commodity?**  **(1-2 sentences)** | I chose this commodity because the iPhone is one of the most well-known products in the world from a single company. It also has parts that come from all over the world, so it will be an interesting product to analyze. |

## **Journal 1.3** | Commentary on Sources

### Instructions & Expectations

For this Journal entry you will need to find **at least five sources** that provide you with information about the production of your commodity. These sources should be either newspaper articles or reports written by governments or non-governmental organizations. These sources should not include editorials/opinion pieces, blog entries, or personal websites.

Look at the questions for your next Journal (1.4) and use these questions to guide your research.

### Succeeding in your Research

To find answers to these questions, begin by looking at the website for the brand you selected. What information do they have about the production of their commodity?  Take notes on what you find. *While you read, consider how the goals of the company may shape what information is included and how it is presented.*

Another obvious starting point is Wikipedia.  You can read this for relevant information and ideas, but it will *not* count as one of your sources.

Research Tip: Articles often make reference to other articles, either in text or in their reference list (if they have one). By following up these links you can quickly expand your pool of relevant sources!

Be persistent: if the first five sources you read do not allow you to sufficiently answer the questions above, read more sources!

### Task

Include the company website, plus at least 5 more relevant sources.  List them, along with a brief commentary.  Write 2-4 sentences of commentary for each source:

* briefly summarize its content and how it contributes to your analysis / what information it provides
* also include the web address of the source

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 4.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Source**  *(Title, Link and/or Publication Info)* | **Commentary** |
| Apple  https://www.apple.com/ | This is the official website for Apple and its products. This is majority consumer-oriented, with ads for its latest products, so I will have to dig a little deeper to find information regarding its suppliers and manufacturing. |
| Where is the iPhone Made?  <https://www.lifewire.com/where-is-the-iphone-made-1999503>? | This article offers an overview of what materials go into creating an iPhone, where those materials come from, and how they are combined into the final product. For example, the article mentions that some camera parts are made in Japan, while the accelerometer is manufactured in Germany and the gyroscope is made in Switzerland. |
| [Apple Inc.](https://www.reuters.com/companies/AAPL.O/financials)  <https://www.reuters.com/companies/AAPL.O/financials> | This article offers an overview on the history of the company, its profits, and other general information. This article can be used to answer preliminary questions about the investigation. |
| Women force change at Indian iPhone plant, sick from bad food, crowded dorms <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/women-force-change-indian-iphone-plant-sick-bad-food-crowded-dorms-2021-12-30/> | This article is a Reuters investigation into one Foxconn-run (assembly, not producing) factory and the condition its workers are in. I can use this article to answer the question about the working conditions of the people who assemble the iPhone. |
| Are iPhones Bad for the Environment?  <https://www.compareandrecycle.co.uk/blog/are-iphones-bad-for-the-environment> | This article discusses the environmental impacts of the supply chain for an iPhone, from mining raw materials to assembly to shipping. I can use this article to figure out the environmental impacts of the iPhone. |
| Apple reports record profits amid concerns over economic impact of coronavirus <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jan/28/apple-quarterly-earnings-iphone-11> | This article, almost 2 years old, summarizes Apple’s Q1 earnings into a more easily understandable format. I can use this article to find out more about how much economic impact the iPhone has made, and justify it with Apple’s official reports. |
| Impact of Smartphones over Society  <https://www.keyideasinfotech.com/blog/impact-of-smartphone-on-society/> | This article goes over smartphones’ general impact on society, but I can use this article for just iPhones in general since they have more than half of the market share in the United States. This article can be used to answer what social impact iPhones have had. |
|  |  |

### Self-Assessment

*Ready to begin your Final Analysis & Reflection (Journal 1.4)?*

Some of the questions in Journal 1.4 may be easier to answer than others -- it isn't always possible to find detailed information about every aspect of a commodity chain. Here is a self-assessment rubric to help you confirm when you've done enough research to begin the final analysis.

* Do you feel like you can sufficiently answer all or most of the questions in Journal 1.4? YES or NO
* If there are questions in Journal 1.4 you still feel you cannot answer, can you give a brief explanation of where and how you looked for the information, and why you think you were not able to find it? YES or NO

*If you answer "YES" to both questions, you are probably ready to begin!*

*If you answer "NO" to either of these questions, look back at the sources you have and also consider looking for more sources.*

## **Journal 1.4** | Final Analysis & Reflection

### Instructions & Expectations

Drawing on the information you learned from your sources, write your analysis & reflection by responding to each of the following questions; each response should be **150 – 250 words, unless otherwise noted**.

DUE DATE: This assignment needs to be completed by **11:59pm the day BEFORE your Discussion Section in Week 4**.

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| 1. **What commodity and brand did you pick? (1 sentence)** |
| I picked the Apple iPhone. |
| 1. **Where are the headquarters for the company that sells this commodity, and what is the company’s annual profit? (1-2 sentences)** |
| Apple is located in Cupertino, California, in the middle of Silicon Valley. They made approximately 94.68 billion dollars in 2020. |
| 1. *Describe* **| Where do the materials for the commodity come from, and how are they produced?** |
| First, the iPhone itself is designed in Apple’s headquarters in California, where it goes through hundreds of prototypes before settling on a final model. The materials required to create the iPhone come from many different places, but most rare earth materials, which are the ones that are combined and used in electronic circuits, are mined in Mongolia. These materials include lanthanides, scandium, and yttrium. In addition to this, Apple sources parts from Japan (camera, compass, LCD screen), Switzerland (gyroscope), Germany (accelerometer), the U.S. (glass screen, Wi-Fi Ship, audio chips), and China (battery). Interestingly, Apple gets some of its iPhone parts from rival smartphone companies, such as its battery and processor, which comes from Samsung (its biggest competitor), and its LCD screen, which comes from LG, another Korean smartphone company. Unlike the raw materials procured from and mined in Mongolia, these parts are created in factories normally. Finally, all of the software is created in the U.S.; in fact, a $500 million data center was built in North Carolina for Apple’s use quite recently. |
| 1. *Assess* **| What are the working conditions of the people who *produce* the materials?** |
| I couldn’t find many sources that discussed the working conditions of the people who *produce* the materials; rather, I found articles on the people who assembled them. This is most likely because the mines and other factories which service Apple also service hundreds of other companies. Obviously, the conditions for mines and other raw materials will be bad in developing countries, but I could not find a source that says for certain that the mines that service Apple have bad working conditions. I mostly looked online, but I took a trip to the library to see if I could dig up anything more. |
| 1. *Describe* **| Where and how is the commodity assembled?** |
| Apple contracts to two companies to assemble almost all iPhones – FoxConn and Pegatron, both based in Taiwan, but have factories all over Asia, mostly concentrated in the South and Southeast. However, there is one huge factory employing almost 350,000 people that exclusively makes iPhones, located in Zhengzhou, China, a city in one of China’s poorest regions. Here, phones are assembled using parts imported from specialists in other countries in a conventional assembly line. There are also many complex machines that Apple design, prototype, and engineer in California and then send over to factories in China to help with more efficient assembly, such as a gyroscope tester and large-capacity furnaces. Next, after the phone has been assembled, thousands of phones are loaded into large aluminum packages and sent by plane (Apple tried cargo ships for a while, but since iPhones were so small, using planes was more cost-effective and fast) to Apple distribution centers, where they distribute to retailers such as the official Apple stores as well as places like Costco or Best Buy. |
| 1. *Assess* **| What are the working conditions of the people who *assemble* the commodity?** |
| The working conditions of people who asseble iPhones are extremely unsatisfactory. Workers usually work a 60 hour workweek and make a little less than $2 an hour – compare this to workers in the U.S., who earn about $23 an hour and work a 40 hour workweek. Additionally, living conditions are quite poor, with 7 or more people sharing a single dorm room, often with no running water or electricity. There have been numerous suicides at the factory with workers jumping out of the 7th or 8th story of dorm rooms as well as the factory itself. The workplace environment in terms of people is also very aggressive. One worker mentions that his manager “won’t scold you”…if they find a mistake during production. Instead, “they will scold you in front of everyone in a meeting later.” Sometimes, when a worker has made an especially costly mistake, he or she is made to write a formal apology letter and read it out at the meeting. |
| 1. *Assess* **| What are the other impacts (environmental, social, economic) of producing and assembling the commodity?** |
| Iphones, and smartphones in general, have a relatively short lifespan – most people just keep a phone for a year, throw it away and get the new generation when it comes out. However, Apple is making moves to curb the environmental impact that new manufactured iPhones have by using recyclable materials – Apple now uses 100% recycled tin in their microprocessor, and have robots that harvest raw materials from thrown away iPhones. Additionally, some Apple Stores and data centers are now powered by 100% renewable energy.  However, mining raw materials for iPhones and huge manufacturing factories have had a huge impact on the environment. Apple reports that 71% of its carbon emissions are caused by mining and manufacturing, and that carbon emissions are only going up with each new generation of iPhone. Apple also makes it hard to repair your phone if you crack the screen or do something else, preventing you from simply keeping the phone and not upgrading.  Economically, Apple has bolstered the world economy as a whole. Apple is worth $3 trillion now, which is bigger than the GDP of most countries, including Brazil, Italy, and Canada. Note that iPhone sales make up more than half of these earnings. Apple has also created millions of jobs in the United States and many millions more in other countries. Recently, Apple decided to invest $430 billion in the US economy, including suppliers, data centers, and movie productions for their streaming service, Apple TV+.  Socially, the iPhone brought what we now consider a smartphone, pioneering touch screens, a voicemail where you could pick messages, as well as other industry firsts. However, it has also, according to some people, given society a new addiction, almost as bad as tobacco or opium – glowing phone screens. |
| 1. *Critically Reflect* **| How easily were you able to find information about the commodity? What challenges did you face, and what might be the reasons for these challenges?** |
| Since the iPhone is one of the most well-known products in the world, I think there were more resources than normal exploring its supply chain. The main challenge I faced was finding resources that talked about Apple’s connection to raw materials mined in Mongolia and elsewhere, as well as sifting through different perspectives on workers’ conditions and Apple’s role in this – for example, when asked about the Foxconn suicides, Steve Jobs simply remarked that the suicide rate in Foxconn, almost a nation-state in itself employing 300,000+ people, was lower than the United States’s. I might have faced these challenges purely because Apple was – and is – such a gigantic company, with ties all over the world; people might not have bothered writing about where Apple procured its raw materials from because they genuinely didn’t know – the connections might have been too tenuous, too thin, to warrant any sort of investigation. However, I am thankful I picked such a popular product and not something like an H&M jacket, since people definitely wouldn’t bother to investigate that. |
| 1. *Connect* **| How do your findings about your commodity connect to concepts about political economy we discussed in class (i.e. in the lectures, section, or textbook)?** |
| Learning about Foxconn and its gigantic factory made me think about how Apple is using flexible accumulation to build up its profits as much as possible – in its initial stages, most manufacturing of Apple’s computers and other hardware was done in the U.S., but as manufacturing costs increased, Apple began offshoring factories and outsourcing jobs to workers in developing countries to save money and turn a bigger profit.  Additionally, the exchange of ideas between different countries just to build a single product – Apple designing it in California, sending it over to Taiwan and the Phillippines for prototyping, and then finally to China for building, made me think that this was just another version of the triangle trade, with different resources coming in from different places, combining, and making something brand new. |
| 1. *Connect* | **How have your ideas/feelings about this commodity changed after learning about it** |
| My feelings about the iPhone have changed quite a bit. I always knew there was a bit of overseas work going into the manufacturing of the iPhone, but I never thought that it was going to be to this extent. Since every iPhone box says “designed in California”, I just thought that the iPhone was manufactured here by skilled, well-paid workers. However, after learning more about the long hours that workers put in to assemble parts just for what we consider spare change, I look at my phone in a different way. It was also interesting to me how most of the parts in an iPhone are not actually manufactured by Apple at all – they just subcontract to Asian companies which both build and test the processor, and then have their name slapped on it and put in one of millions of iPhones. It made me realize what Steve Jobs said about Apple a decade ago was true – Apple is, first and foremost, a design company. |
| 1. *Reflect* |**What have you learned about yourself while completing this project? (1-3 sentences)** |
| I have learned that I should try to consider what goes into a product without taking it for granted. I should acknowledge that many people work long hours just to get a product into my hands, including miners, manufacturers, shippers, etc. |
| 1. *Advise* **| What would you do differently if you did this assignment again to achieve more in-depth answers? (1-3 sentences)** |
| I should have e-mailed reporters for the articles I read and asked them for more information, perhaps pointing me to a different, more comprehensive source than the one I was considering. |