

You, Your Camera, Your Subject: A tricky triangle in cross-cultural settings

The relationship between you, your camera and your subject is more complicated than you might think. Together, the three shed light on the intricacies of cross-cultural photography.

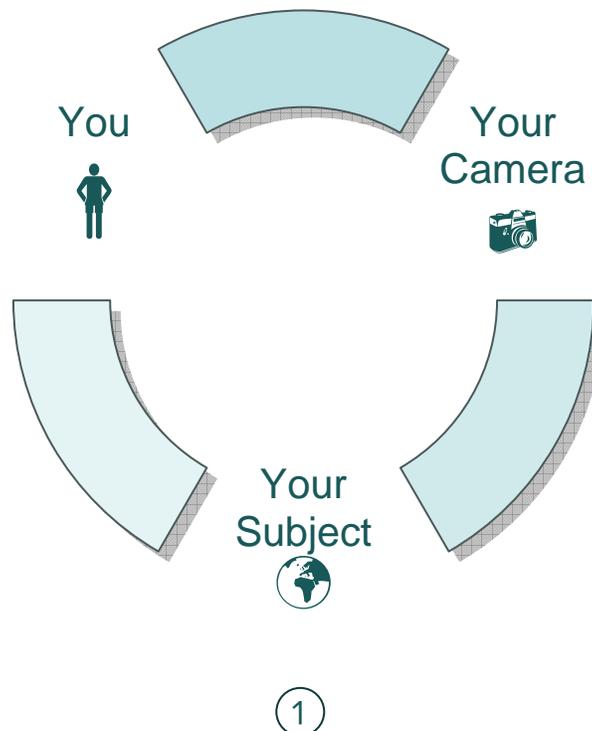
by Kate Berardo

Before you even take your first shot, your camera has already made an impression—for better or worse—on the people around you. As you survey your surroundings, certain things—things that appeal to your interests or that seem exotic or colorful or new—are influencing you. These subjects call out for your attention and beg for your camera's focus. And sometimes, they leave potentially fascinating cultural insight in their shadows—escaping both your camera's lenses and eventually, your memory.

We tend to think of photography as sequential—(1) you take a picture (2) through your camera (3) of a subject.



When the relationship between you, your camera, and your subject is much more interrelated.



Consider the following relationships:

<p>You  ↔ Your Camera </p>	<p>You control the camera and what pictures you take.</p> <p>At the same time, your camera controls your image. It tells people you are a tourist and often suggests you have money.</p> <p>If you are not careful, your camera can also control your experience. It is easy to consume yourself with trying to get great shots with your camera. In the meantime, however, you can forget to live in the moment and experience cultures first-hand.</p>
<p>You  ↔ Your Subject </p>	<p>You choose your subject—what you want to take pictures of.</p> <p>And yet your subjects in many ways choose you. People tend to take pictures of the things that interest them.</p> <p>Photos dictate much of what we recall from the past, so these subjects ultimately shape your memory of the travels.</p>
<p>Your Camera  ↔ Your Subject </p>	<p>Photography gives you a chance to make human connections with people from other cultures and capture their human expressions through your camera.</p> <p>Your camera can, however, threaten, offend, and make other people feel nervous.</p>

When taking photos in different cultural settings, remember these dynamics. Keep in mind your camera says certain things about you to those around you. Don't let photo-taking take priority over first-hand experiencing and always be sensitive to the impact your camera may be having on your subjects. If there is a chance the photography won't be well-received, don't shoot. Take a mental picture instead. ✧

*Kate Berardo, founder of the cultural awareness portal www.culturocity.com, is a Northwestern educated inter-cultural specialist who helps people from different cultures, backgrounds, and schools of thought understand each other and work effectively together. She is the co-author of **Putting Diversity to Work** with colleagues George Simons and Simma Lieberman and the *Executive Planet Guide to Doing Business with the US*.*

For more tips on photo-taking across cultures, download the entire *Pop Culturocity Guide to Photography*, available at www.culturocity.com. This article may be reprinted with the author's permission: email kate@culturocity.com with requests.