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THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS ON PRODUCTIVITY

by

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This paper carries a title which was supplied to the writer; it contains three concepts which require definition - traditional, custom, and productivity. For present purposes the dictionary definitions of two of these concepts will suffice. Thus custom, as "the whole body of usages or practices which regulate social life", and traditional, as that which is handed down from the past, are acceptable. Here, only passing reference will be made to the availability elsewhere of treatments by the present author in which more specific sociological meanings are imputed to the terms, (1) as for example, the implication that the word traditional (in the manner of Max Weber and Parsons) connotes "immunity from rational or other criticism". (2) The word productivity as used here implies certain assumptions concerning the division of human labour. First of all it is assumed that high productivity on the part of a society cannot be achieved without differentiation of functions, two major categories of which are found in field activities which produce raw agricultural, mineral, and similar products, and in centre activities which specialize in refinement, marketing and transportation of finished products. A nation or society can be highly productive or "wealthy only if few of its resources are required to produce food for subsistence". (3) It is thus assumed that industrialization cannot reach a high potential without urbanization. "Urbanization is the indispensable partner of industrialization, the measure of its growth, the mirror of its complexities, the interpreter of its values, and the matrix of its expansion". (4) In these various references to urbanization and the forms of production it is assumed that the efficiency of production in terms of inputs of both human and physical resources may be measured and compared with the product or output. In this manner the contribution of sub-systems, units and parts of society as a system may be assessed. What has been called functional integration, or the interrelation of units and parts in the process of production will be discussed in more detail later.

A typological, and what some would call a theoretical approach to the "influence of traditional customs on productivity" will be employed. Among the concepts or models which seem useful in this discussion is the "perfectly

integrated group"⁽⁵⁾ or society. For Robin Williams, who has perhaps used this concept to the greatest advantage,⁽⁶⁾ the perfectly integrated society is a mental construct not found in the empirical world. In the perfectly integrated society actors find it a pleasure to "do their duty",⁽⁷⁾ and spontaneous approval is given to all who do so. In such a society "institutions are not embodied in clearly defined associations or groups, but are merely norm complexes to which the behavior of all members of the society is oriented..... this model of a society with unspecialized institutions does not exist - even at a tribal level....."⁽⁸⁾ Such a society is not functionally differentiated and cannot avail itself of the advantages of the division of labour. It may be characterized as being normatively integrated, solidary and Gemeinschaft-like.⁽⁹⁾

In contrast are those societies in which a high degree of differentiation of function enables man to take advantage of specialization and the division of labour. In such societies both functional integration and normative integration become crucial problems. Functional integration of differentiated communities and societies may be measured in terms of the value of goals achieved in relation to the cost of achieving these goals. A society bent upon increasing its productivity will attend to its "least-cost" point. If profit is considered to be "the difference between expenses and receipts",⁽¹⁰⁾ and the costs of production "simply expenses reduced to a unit basis"⁽¹¹⁾ the "changes in the cost-rates of the major cost-elements will affect the location of the least cost point much more than changes in cost-rates of the lesser cost elements".⁽¹²⁾ The functionally integrated community or society with high productivity achieves efficiency through the allocation of human and physical resources in such a manner as to attain the highest profit combination with attention paid to least cost combinations. By such considerations communities and societies may be compared in terms of the values of their achieved goals as these relate to the time and facilities invested in that attainment. The efficacy of functional integration is in effect being measured. For example, the cost of delivering x items of mail for cities of varying size under various conditions in accordance with certain specified standards may be calculated. Both cost and profit in production and marketing of such items as coffee, tractors, etc. by various companies and/or syndicates may be reckoned. In the economic literature efficiency may be described in terms of the contribution of inputs of land, labour, capital (or facilities) and entrepreneurship in relation to the output. In the sociological literature organizational forms as they vary with respect to authority patterns, status-rôle, rank ascribed and achieved, communication, size, and other aspects of collectives are considered in relation to goal attainment. Those forms and types of organization which demonstrate functional integration and goal-attainment efficacy are frequently characterized by sociologists as being Gesellschaft-like in nature.

In general the efficient organization of human and non-human resources requires that the actors be motivated to make the greatest possible organizational contribution and that they experience a minimum of restrictions. This requires that in large measure the rank of actors and the status-rôles they occupy be determined by (a) the relative values imputed by society to its various organizations, and, (b) within these sub-systems, the relative values imputed to various status-rôles, and (c) within the category defined by a given status-rôle, the values imputed to the contributions of the individual actors. Under such conditions it may be assumed that institutional procedures have been developed and legitimized whereby actors in sufficient numbers and with appropriate capacities are mobilized, trained, and allocated to the status-rôles within the productive

organizations, and that once mobilized and allocated, their potential contributions are utilized efficiently. As in the perfectly integrated society discussed above the efficient urbanized and industrialized society produces and matches personalities and motivations to organizational requirements so that doing what one wants to do coincides with organizational needs.

But how does the small, homogeneous, isolated, stable society become differentiated and at the same time able to retain to a certain extent, the quality which makes its actors find it a pleasure to "do their duty" and receive spontaneous approval from others for so doing? How do societies attain and maintain functional integration? How may communities and societies increase their efficiency and their morale? An examination of a model Gesellschaft-like community or society may, without claiming final answers for these questions, provide useful clues. Unlike the "perfectly integrated society" the emphasis of which is on normative integration, the model Gesellschaft-like society will yield insights on functional integration, a kind of integration which in such societies receives high priority.

In the efficient Gesellschaft-like organizations, incumbents of the various status-roles in all their variations must be replaceable. The extremes of the standardization process are well described by Alfred Krupp, the famous German industrialist:

What I shall attempt to bring about is that nothing shall be dependent upon the life or existence of any particular person; that nothing of any importance shall happen or be caused to happen without the fore-knowledge and approval of management; that the past and the determinate future of the establishment can be learned in the files of the management without asking a question of any mortal.(13)

Situations which have become more or less uniform through standardization are often referred to in sociological literature as having been bureaucratized. The characteristics of effective bureaucracies have been probed by Max Weber and others.(14) They may be considered as systems exhibiting the following attributes:

- (1) a hierarchy of status-roles under which the actors are subject to discipline,
- (2) actors who are remunerated by fixed salaries which are determined by competence or achievement in terms of the ends and norms of the system;
- (3) actors who have only the bureaucracy as their single primary referent;
- (4) actors who are subject to the coercive discipline of the organization;
- (5) actors who through indoctrination and training internalize to a high degree the ends, norms, beliefs and sentiments of the bureaucracy.

Of course some activities which flourish in industrial societies are less bureaucratized than others. Research, medical treatment, graduate training, designing, and other non-uniform operations come to mind. Litwak(15) finds that those bureaucracies which specialize in human relations as well as those which are comprised almost entirely of professionals exhibit less impersonal relations, hierarchical authority, separation of policy and administrative decisions, and specialization than the ideal type of bureaucracy as specified by Max Weber.

Despite the imperfect applicability of the ideal bureaucratic model to certain forms of productive activity, its principal features are nevertheless of wide general pertinence to all industrial societies. Functional integration of the parts of a given enterprise, even within the less pure bureaucratic types just noted, is usually rendered less effective upon deviation from any of the above specified bureaucratic attributes - gratuities, bribes, and graft, for example, in lieu of salaries institutionally fixed in accordance with competence or achievement; or competing and equally compelling allegiances to multiple organizations, in lieu of complete commitment to a single primary referent.

The sub-systems of functionally integrated Gesellschaft-like empirical systems such as productive enterprises, community or society, must have in addition to interchangeable parts, certain other features some of which are implied in the bureaucratic attributes noted by Weber. Their models, like certain automated cybernetic devices must not only lubricate and fuel themselves; they must provide replaceable parts, select the most suitable units from among those available, and themselves utilize these parts in accordance with both highest profit and least cost formulae. For high productivity in such systems there is no place among and between the units for sentiments or other linkages which possess the potential of obstructing the most effective allocating of "parts", whether they be human or physical resources. In the area under discussion what are the possible impediments to the development of the functionally integrated Gesellschaft?

Particularistic-ascriptive attributes of Latin American society. Although sufficiently generalizable knowledge concerning the social and cultural structures of the communities and societies under consideration is not available and although the variations from society to society are great, some tentative statements based on the literature for the area and from observations of social scientists may be made. Parsons⁽¹⁶⁾ for instance has observed that Latin American societies in contrast to those of the United States of America, Germany and classical China, most nearly approximate the ideal type of particularistic-ascriptive relationships and values. In this formulation, Latin Americans are assumed characteristically to give primacy to the personal, not the impersonal, aspects of relationships, and to stress appreciative or expressive rather than the cognitive aspects of action. Concretely the actor, whether from Latin America or elsewhere, when particularistically oriented thinks: "I must try to help him because he is my friend, (or) kinsman, a neighbour, or..... fellow member of any solidary group because of this membership", ⁽¹⁷⁾ or particular relationship. In a society which gives primacy to particularistic relations the actors place various relationships and particularly the expressive aspect of these ahead of general or universal principles of conduct.

This is not to say that particularistic considerations are unknown in those societies which subscribe primarily to a non-particularistic orientation. Its presence incipient and real, in the United States for example, is the only possible rationale for laws prohibiting nepotism as well as for its occasional occurrence despite the laws. Nor is it a judgemental evaluation of which is "better" as a mode of orientation. Providing a job for a relative or friend because he is a relative or friend may be quite as good a reason as the practice of staffing and "stock-piling" personnel for maximum productivity; further, the two need not necessarily be incompatible. It is to say, however, that wherever particularistic considerations are chosen over universalistic considerations, primacy is not being accorded maximal productivity as a goal. It is on this basis alone - the relation of the particularistic orientation to productivity - that

the subject has pertinence for the present paper. The pertinencies of such considerations are of course clear to all whose observations lead them to concur with one observer who claims that in Mexico, "nepotism in government and business is common and expected", (18) or with another who reports that in the same country the mordida, or bribing of officials is common.(19)

Consonant with the particularistic orientation which is often thought of as traditional in most Latin American societies, is the predominance of ascription. In societies which give primacy to ascription, actors are evaluated as objects not in terms of what they do (or their performance), but in terms of ascription (or who they are). This ascriptive (or quality) orientation, like particularism, places emphasis upon family and other relationships which are not derived from achievement. Who one is, not what one can do, is the important consideration. Again, this is not to say that ascription is not used in those societies which subscribe primarily to an achievement orientation. The differential opportunities for achievement in even the most upwardly-mobile societies is a clear proof of the omnipresence of ascriptive factors. It is to say, however, that wherever ascription is used to the virtual de-emphasis or negation of achievement, primacy is not being accorded maximal productivity as a goal.

In terms of the present paper "traditional customs" which emphasize particularism and ascription impede the development of complex, differentiated societies with functional integration and high actual or potential efficiency of production. Such societies are characterized by a "vested interest in stability", (20) an "individualistic" rather than a general collectivity orientation, and non-authoritarianism in those aspects of life such as expressive and moral action, which are accorded the highest values. Authoritarian dictatorship may be common in those areas of life which are of little importance and leaders in such dictatorships may hold position through expressive rather than instrumental qualities. Caudillos or personal and charismatic leaders may rise to power whereas the bureaucratic functionary with rational legitimate authority may have relatively less chance to influence trends. Not unrelated to this tendency for authority and power to be personalized is the widespread practice of the mordida or bribe. Whetten notes that "perhaps the most serious obstacle to democratic functioning of government (in Mexico) is the mordida ('bite')..... (for which) there is no translation in English".(21) Many students of Latin America would maintain that the primacy of the family is a distinctive feature of the cultures. In this connexion it is of interest to note that the Mexican student in the United States "continues to feel the family is important, (but) he rejects many traditional attitudes and approves of greater freedom for women, less authoritarian child training.....".(22) Few characteristics of the areas under study bring the social structure into sharper relief than the mordida and nepotism-features common to societies which place primacy on particularism and ascription.

Stratification systems. The rational model for the so-called "open class system" often considered as characteristic of industrial societies would provide institutionalized procedures whereby each actor's rank is determined by his contribution to the goals of the society in accordance with the norms of standards by which the contribution is made. In the region under consideration there are wide variations in the extent to which ability at birth is nurtured and trained, finds employment and is rewarded. Tax(23) notes that in the Western Highland region of Guatemala, there is little passage from the Indian segments to the Ladino segments of the stratification system.

Since freedom of movement both vertically and horizontally is crucial for the development of the functionally integrated Gesellschaft-like society, Ralph Beals' summary concerning vertical mobility is appropriate:

In countries with plural Indian cultures, horizontal movement between Indian societies is negligible and not significant for our purposes. Rather, the question is whether Indians can move into the mestizo or similar classes. In this respect Mexico has perhaps gone furthest, for "Indian" is defined ethnically, not racially, and by definition a person working in a factory, and usually a person living in a city, is "non-Indian", regardless of ethnic or racial origin. Moreover, Indians can move, albeit slowly, into rural mestizo classifications. In Guatemala, an anomalous situation exists, for horizontal movement is often possible for the Indian when he leaves his community; within his community, however, movement into the mestizo (here called "ladino") group is regarded as a vertical movement and is virtually impossible.(24)

Although Negroes in the area vary greatly in their mobility and although their relations with other segments of stratification systems are not limited to those prescribed by caste, nowhere in the area is there complete lack of ascription.

Beals finds that although there are exceptions, "the middle class (does not) emerge as a bulwark of political stability in Latin America, even if we accept the conventional view of its presence..... Only in Mexico does there seem to have been a thorough reorganization of the upper class in terms of power and wealth. While an aristocratic elite (descendent from the two-class feudal system) still clings to its superiority, except in so far as it has entered newer fields of enterprise, it is on the whole a down-at-the-heel and nostalgic social elite with little influence on national life".(25) In so far as there is anywhere a "hard working" middle class the culture and society in general places a high evaluation only upon intellectual "work". Here it may be reiterated that there are such variations from country to country, and from area to area within countries, that too heavy reliance upon generalizations is unwarranted. In his own study of class in Costa Rica, for example, the author found that the differences in perception of rank between two communities, one a small sized family-owned farm area and the other a large-scale hired labour operation, were striking.(26)

In any case ascriptive rank continues to be of importance in the degree to which it prevents specialization and functional integration from contributing to a country's productivity. It remains important even for Mexican students in the United States:

Although (the Mexican student)..... remains much more concerned with status symbols than is his American counterpart, he nevertheless rejects the symbols verbally and becomes less status-conscious in behaviour..... Mexico is still a strongly class - or status-conscious - culture; but by comparison with other Latin American countries one sees the great magnitude of the change that has occurred in Mexico in this respect and appreciates the fluidity of the society.(27)

If these trends are to prevail it may be predicted that in the future particularism, ascription and familism will wane in the area as industrialism and

urbanism form the basic pattern. Achievement orientation and universalism will then become more dominant, work teams and nations as systems more important, and the family less important. During the process of the development of differentiation, functional integration, and greatly increased productivity, such factors as particularism, ascription, and the relatively low evaluation on achievement and instrumental action will, in so far as they persist, constitute impediments to the process.

NOTES

1. Charles P. Loomis, Social Systems - Essays on Their Persistence and Change (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1960), pp. 16 ff.
2. Talcott Parsons, The Structure of Social Action (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Co., 1937), p. 646.
3. Earl O. Heady and Joseph Ackerman, Rural Sociology, Vol. 24, No. 4, Dec. 1959. See also Charles P. Loomis, op. cit., p. 63.
4. Paul Meadows, "The Industrial Way of Life", Technology Review, March 1946. In the area under discussion as Kirchoff observed "from what we know generally about Mesoamerica, and from the general pattern the world over, wherever humanity has reached a cultural level of having city vs. country, the leadership has always been the city". Sol Tax, et al., Heritage of Conquest - The Ethnology of Middle America (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952), p. 255. As Kingsley Davis and Ana Casis have observed "the general population of the Latin American countries is growing at an exceedingly fast pace, yet the cities are growing even faster, and the larger cities are growing with phenomenal speed". "Urbanization in Latin America", The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, Vol. 24, No. 2, April 1946. See also Olen Leonard and Charles Loomis, Readings in Latin American Social Organization and Institutions. (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1953). See Part VI for the peculiar aspects of urbanization in Latin America.
5. Talcott Parsons, op. cit., p. 33.
6. Charles P. Loomis and Zona K. Loomis, Modern Social Theories (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), p. 587.
7. Robin M. Williams, Jr., American Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), p. 374.
8. Ibid., p. 515.
9. Charles P. Loomis, op. cit., Essay 2.
10. John D. Black, Introduction to Production Economics (New York: Henry Holt, 1926), p. 315.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 320.
13. As quoted in Fredrick L. Nussbaum, A History of Economic Institutions of Modern Europe. (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1935), p. 479.
14. Charles P. Loomis, op. cit., p. 148.
15. Eugene Litwak, "Models of Bureaucracy which Permit Conflict", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 67, No. 2, Sept. 1961.

16. Talcott Parsons, The Social System (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1951), pp. 198 ff.
17. Ibid., p. 62.
18. Ralph L. Beals and N. D. Humphrey, No Frontier to Learning - The Mexican Student in the United States (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 14.
19. Nathan L. Whetten, Rural Mexico (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 550.
20. Talcott Parsons, The Social System, op.cit. p. 199 and Ralph L. Beals and N. D. Humphrey, op.cit., p. 8
21. Ibid., p. 199; see also Parsons, Social Systems, op. cit.
21. Nathan L. Whetten, op. cit., p. 545.
22. Ralph L. Beals and N. D. Humphrey, op. cit.
23. Sol Tax, American Anthropologist, Vol. 43, 1941.
24. Ralph L. Beals, "Social Stratification in Latin America", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 58, No. 4, Jan. 1953, p. 338.
25. Ibid., p. 337
26. Charles P. Loomis, Thomas L. Norris and Charles H. Proctor, "Social Status and Communication", in Charles P. Loomis, et. al., eds., Turrialba; Social Systems and the Introduction of Change (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, c1953), Chap. III.
27. Ralph L. Beals and N. D. Humphrey, op. cit., pp. 9, 15.