

Sociology and social sciences

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The traditional social sciences which have been developed as part of the totality of learning in the West have been brought over to Asia. It is now becoming increasingly evident that the validity of such social sciences, whether in the realm of research theory or of action policy, can no longer be accepted uncritically. An appreciation of what is valid or invalid, applicable or inapplicable, is therefore imperative.

Such analysis is necessary not only as an academic venture; social change is basic to the Asian aspiration for modernization and the need is urgent for such change to be directed towards the achievement of what may well be Asian as distinguished from non-Asian goals. CULTURE The problem is clear and present. The Asian academic world, until now, has been staffed with many scholars whose training has been, for the most part, in Western universities and institutions. At the same time, the political and intellectual leadership in the larger life of its society is held to a significant degree of Western-trained leaders.

The orientation of many of these leaders has been conditioned by the predominantly Western culture. Trained to think in Western terms through the medium of Western languages, some are experiencing a reawakening to the reality of their situation. Asian intellectuals are undergoing an agonizing period of soul-searching. Their system of values, developed through years of training in, and broad exposure to, Western philosophies, is being shattered by a realization that these values may not be suitable to the Asian environment.

Recently, Professor Ruben Santos-Cuyugan of the University of the Philippines expressed misgivings about the movement towards the <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-and-social-sciences/>

unification of all knowledge, including the assumption of “ universal categories of culture” and the universality of value judgment. This movement, according to him, makes the social scientist evade one of his fundamental responsibilities which is “ to examine the ways by which his science and thought, indeed his very perceptions, are rooted in the matrix of his own culture” (Santos-Cuyugan 1967). POLITICS

In the meantime, in the realm of politics, the postwar leaders of Asia have discovered that independence has not automatically ushered in the Utopia. Thus, they are not seeking the nature and structure of government that will best meet their needs, the political philosophies their peoples should embrace or adopt, and the policies that will bring about the good society by their indigenous standards and values. A starting point is the fact that with a few exceptions, the developing countries of Asia profess belief in freedom and human rights, the rule of law and constitutional government.

These concepts and maxims are manifested in their constitutions. However, in spite of guarantees enshrined in their constitutions, these countries find it difficult to achieve real constitutional democracy. For the constitutions of the West have, in many cases, been transplanted to Asian soil without the historical experience that nurtured them in the West, where they were the products of a long period of evolution and development. Democracy implies mass participation by the people in the political process.

But if the people are not sufficiently educated in the processes of democracy, or have not sufficiently imbibed its spirit, how can it flourish? In fact, one wonders whether or not the structure of government of the Philippines, patterned as it is after the outlined in the American Constitution,

is not really a hindrance to, rather than an instrument for, national development. In any case, it has become quite clear that Western-style democracy has to be modified so as to satisfy the urgent Asian desire for economic progress and social justice.

Liberty, as this term is used in the West, has mainly the negative connotation of freedom from arbitrary restraint. In the Asian setting, it must be given a positive content; governments have to assume a greater responsibility for providing opportunities for the growth and self-realization of citizens. In the same manner, “justice” has had mainly a political connotation in the West, where it is usually associated with law and social behavior. In Asia, if political justice were not integrally related to economic justice, it would be almost peripheral to the real problems.

In so far as Asians are concerned, economic justice is the more relevant concept because it touches the heart of the existing social order. In this sense, it is associated with the eradication of poverty and the alleviation of human suffering. Another qualification should be made. There is so much lip-service to the concept of “rule of law” in many Asian societies. By this, people are supposed to be guided by certain legal precepts in their social relations. However, in the Philippine experience, despite the fact that most Filipinos are professed and vocal adherents of the “rule of law.”

They do not find difficulty in transgressing legal rules because in the business of everyday living, non-legal rules oftentimes command greater obedience than legal ones, especially when values such as family and kinship ties are involved. This is part of the explanation of such phenomenon as nepotism. Which is certainly frowned upon by the formal laws of society, but

which is carried out in practice by almost everyone in political authority. Finally, bureaucracy, as an institution, is in external forms and manifestations similar to its prototype in the West.

The same formal methods of recruitment, of organizational charts, of job descriptions, etc. , are utilized. But the ethos that animates Asian bureaucracy is obviously quite different from what animates Western bureaucracy. ECONOMICS The discipline of economics gives many illustrations of the limits of applicability of Western concepts, values and methods. The most evident at the moment is the emergence of new branches of study, such as development economics, and of a more socio-psychological approach to the study of economic systems than Keynesian economics allowed at an earlier period.

Thus even in the West, there is a growing recognition (e. g. , Hagen 1962), that if economic growth is to occur, a country's cultural patterns must be such as to produce " high need-achievement" directed towards " clusters of followers" once innovations are made. In fact, to achieve substantial economic development, it is suggested that the number of individuals with the entrepreneurial-motivational complex, and particularly with high achievement drives, will have to be significantly increased.

Again, many Western economists have been laboring under the assumption of conventional analysis that the missing elements in developing societies are modern technical knowledge, capital, specially trained manpower, and a sound plan for using capital, manpower and technical knowledge. Once these elements were made available, they assumed, progress will automatically ensue. The international economic policy of the Western nations have

therefore generally been geared towards providing these missing elements, with perhaps the strongest bias being in the provision of capital as the principal agent of development.

The view is still widespread that if Asian countries can only obtain, through their own efforts or through foreign assistance, a sufficient amount of capital, they would be able to “finish the job” of development. The truth is that investment, whether public or private is subject to the risks, uncertainties and eccentricities of the poor public administration. Since development is a process, it is subject at every stage to how effectively the government can execute its plans.

Moreover, it is now clear that traditional marginal analysis, however useful it may be as a basis for the understanding of advanced economics, can be very misleading for underdeveloped ones. When such factors as population growth and technological progress are made an integral part of analysis, instead of being left out altogether as in traditional equilibrium theory, our analysis can lead to policy conclusions exactly the reverse of what orthodox equilibrium theory might suggest.

Even with the emergence in the West of development economics as a new field for the study of developing countries, certain biases continue to show. An example is the fact that in the West, economic development as a goal has been reckoned almost exclusively in terms of increases in annual national income. The corollary problem of income distribution has been merely glossed over. This is a serious omission because of the existing wide disparities in incomes among the peoples of the developing nations. This is illustrated in Philippine society.

For this society may be likened to a social pyramid with an acute apex and a very broad base. At the apex is a very small segment of society, the rich and the very rich; at the base are the broad masses of those who are poor and very poor. The constellation of power in our society has traditionally consisted of the hacendero-politico class at the apex of the social pyramid, which held sway over the lives of human beings. More recently, a new industrial class has appeared to increase their numerically few but historically powerful ranks.

The elite class enjoys the benefits of modern technology and the affluence that it makes possible while the vast mass of the population lives close to the subsistence level. There is this a distressing and ever-widening gap in the process to goods and services. It is clear, therefore, that to be relevant to the realities of the Asian situation, economic development should not be reckoned only in terms of annual rates of economic growth, or of doubling national incomes in a decade.

It should be vitally concerned with promoting economic justice, in spreading more widely the benefits of economic progress, and in continuously opening up new opportunities to an ever-widening circle of entrepreneurs and investors in the developing countries. In short, the achievement of economic democracy has to be a primordial goal, alongside the acceleration of the growth process. SOCIOLOGY In the realm of rural sociology, many practical limits to Western social research concepts and methods have been actually discovered in the Philippines. Methods and Techniques

To begin with, planning a research project on the Western pattern is often not warranted by the amount and quality of available resources. There is, for <https://assignbuster.com/sociology-and-social-sciences/>

instance, the problem of shortage of local professional social researchers compounded by the attitude which rural folks have for those social researchers. In the West, its rural folks are used to extension workers, welfare-agency volunteers, missionaries and the like. On the other hand, Philippine researchers and interviewers have been looked upon as philanthropists, as some sort of Rockefeller or Ford Foundation representatives ready to give out material aid (Feliciano 1965).

The establishment of concepts and definitions has not been easy. Social research is built around a framework which requires certain concepts such as household, family, literacy, religion, cooperation, and the like. But a research group, led by Professor Gloria D. Feliciano of the University of the Philippines, has recently concluded that indignant studies wherein these concepts need to be stated in more refined or precise terms, an adaptation is necessary to avoid getting inaccurate data (Feliciano 1965).

The term “ religious affiliation. ” For instance, has a connotation in the Philippines different from that in the West, where individualism and not “ familism” prevails. In the West, it implies not only membership of an individual in a religious group. But usually religious preferences as well. In the Philippines, where close family and community ties are predominant, religious affiliation becomes a family or community matter. Hence, the term does not necessarily imply the religious preference of the individual.

Another example mentioned by a Philippine research group has to do with family types: In this country (Philippines), one may not find a simple or nuclear family defined and interpreted according to Western standards. For, although it may appear simple nuclear structurally, functionally it usually

partakes of the character of the extended type. Studies in recent years have exploded the myth that structurally the Filipino family is of the extended type. Rather, they showed that although the majority of the nuclear families live apart from one another, this did not deter them from helping one another in times of need or crisis. (Castillo 1963 and Feliciano 1964, cited in Feliciano 1965).

In reporting one of his studies, a Filipino researcher expounded on the problem he encountered in regard to the concept of cooperation: In the West, where this term gave rise to cooperatives, one usually thinks of it in terms of a disciplined, highly ordered code of behavior, de-emphasized family loyalties, rigid business principles, and a high degree of rationalized behavior. In short, the term has come to be associated with individual independence.

In the Philippines, however, where the practice is deeply rooted in familiar or family ties, it is a matter of interdependence among individuals. (Provinse 1960, cited in Feliciano 1965). Finally, insofar as the concept of literacy is concerned, a further refinement of sub-types is needed in the Philippines. It has been discovered that very often one encounters people who could literally read and write but who do not fully understand what they read or write.

Role of Women, Role of Education
In another report, Professor Gelia T. Castillo, a pioneer rural research scholar in the Philippines, has found it necessary to reexamine the role of women in the development scheme (Castillo 1964). Her findings showed such strong female influence in family and farm decision-making that for purposes of development work, it would

be more fruitful to classify the Filipino woman in the rural scene as an active initiator, legitimizer, and decision-maker in her own right, rather than just a person who plays a mere supportive role to her husband, her father, or her barrio.

A closer examination of the role of education has likewise been suggested because, while it is a potent instrument for effecting change in agricultural production, education acquires a different dimension when it “rules out mud on educated hands.” This view has been corroborated by another rural researcher, Professor Juan F. Jamias (1967). Who has an interesting explanation for the effectiveness of the “verbal culture” (education, research and extension) in increasing agricultural productivity in the Philippines.

He states that the agricultural college degree in the Philippines has been “white-collarized.” He cites data on the employment distribution of graduates of the College of Agriculture, University of the Philippines, which show that except for 8 percent engaged in farming, all the rest may be classified as white-collar workers. A later and more comprehensive survey revealed that only 1.3 percent were actually engaged in private farming or business. Most of the graduates were actively involved in teaching and extension work. There are other examples of generalization that need closer scrutiny.

In community leadership, does youth versus age necessarily mean change versus status quo? Is the mutual self-help circle, often regarded as an existing resource for cohesive community action, coterminous with the village unit of operations? The problem of concepts and definitions aside, the Feliciano research group has found out, too, that Western scientific sampling

techniques are quite difficult to apply because, oftentimes, sampling universes such as geographic, or political subdivision lines are not definitely established.

Furthermore, in many places, the basic socio-economic structure of the occupational groups, ethnic and religious groups, and types of land-use and land ownership have not been objectively defined. Raw Materials from Research in Action Programs The traditional social research method, which has come down to us from the West, calls for empirical evidence to support existing ideas. Our experience shows that rural research theory in the Philippines, in fact, being enriched by various experiences in research in action programs.

The findings of Professor Gelia Castillo show that the researcher in action setting “ has a unique advantage in obtaining substantive and methodological insights while actually participating in real life events which are part of the process of bringing about change. ” At times, she says the problem which defies any design except the kind which involves a faithful description of down-to-earth happenings, is the most fertile source of insights. Examples to support this view have been cited.

In the Philippines, many extension workers have claimed that most of the researches done are not practical and economically feasible under village conditions (From The Innovator, 1965). In the Philippines, experience, new theories in rural sociology are arising from empirical evidence. And the existing facts and data gathered are quite interesting because they are the results of pioneer efforts, empirically identified with their meanings laid bare

rather than assumed by the conceptualizer. Truly, the agents of change in rural Philippines are breaking virgin ground. Knowing One's Audience

As we have said, in effecting directed social change, Western social scientists have focused their attention on knowing one's audience. Even in the voluminous literature on diffusion studies in the United States, rarely have investigators addressed themselves to the nature of the innovation and the character of the carriers of change. Among the advocates of change, there is an unchallenged assumption that the change being introduced is good, that the change agent is effective and that, therefore, the farmer who refuses to accept the innovation is irrational (Castillo). To be sure, the audience should be known.

Who is the Asian farmer, for instance, whose ways are sought to be changed? This is an extremely important question. Again, one should know his audience in order to evaluate his data. It has been found that the reliability of farmers' responses depends upon the respondent's image of the researcher or interviewer and their expectations from the project. The Role of the Change Agent Be that as it may, to understand the subsistence farmer's response or lack of response to the innovations sought to be introduced, the innovation itself must be proved, and the role of the change agent fully studied.

On the latter point, one of the findings is that oftentimes a change agency is as rigid as the farmers it seeks to change. A former consultant has been quoted as saying that " the problems of development exist just as much in the organization charged with instituting change schemes as they do in the populace they are trying to change. " (Kumata 1960) To other findings have

come out of the Philippine experiments. One is that a change agent can hardly expect to be effective unless his roles is accepted by his clientele.

Rapport with the villagers, therefore, becomes a key factor. The other is that the agent of change in the Philippines should have a versatility unmatched by his counterpart in the West. The enormity and diversity of problem situations he comes to grips with require an interdisciplinary thinking, especially when he is the only social scientist within a radius of many kilometers. He should not be just a rural sociologist or an agricultural economist but a social scientist with expert preparation in his own discipline.

He needs sophistication in social theory, mastery of research methodology, adequate comprehension of bureaucracy and political behavior, and intensive exposure to the world of village action, administration and policy. Towards a Theory for Developing Asian Nations It is of the highest priority that the teachers and practitioners in the social sciences in Asia emancipate themselves from the value-bias of Western concepts and postulates of reasoning. There is need for escaping the universalizing that characterizes much of the social sciences as they have developed in Western academic circles.

Asian social scientists should undergo a truly creative engagement with their own culture and society, making use, in the process, of frameworks that provide standards of relevance to the experiences and aspirations of their own people. It should be constantly borne in the mind that there are limits to the applicability of Western concepts, values and method to Asian realities. It is important therefore, that organized efforts be undertaken to compile and codify the vast amount of scattered data on particular subjects of social

research in the different countries which are to be found in research offices and libraries of universities.

With a commitment to intellectual efforts with a decidedly Asian value base, more genuine works of scholarships in the social sciences should come out of the academic world. With the growing data from field works and social sciences which enable d us to verify the referents of concepts in our respective countries, we may usefully embark on the ambitious project of setting up a theory for the developing Asian nations, and in the process, hopefully, understand ourselves.