CULTURAL CHANGE AND PERSISTENCE

New Perspectives on Development

Edited by

William Ascher and John M. Heffron

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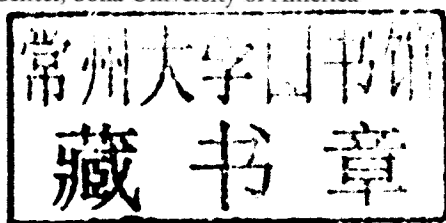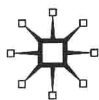Edited by William Ascher and John M. Heffron

Prepared under the auspices of the Pacific Basin
Research Center, Soka University of America

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macmillan

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To the memory of our fathers, Meyer S. Ascher and John L. Heffron, who instilled in their children the qualities of curiosity, imagination, and respect for life that sustain this work.

Preface and Acknowledgments

Soka University of America (SUA) is dedicated to peaceful, humanistic development. An important aspect of this is the preservation of cherished cultural beliefs and practices in the face of changes wrought by development. With this in mind, SUA's Pacific Basin Research Center (PBRC) commissioned a broad range of essays on how societies have grappled with the challenge of fostering both development and culture to enhance human dignity. These essays do not presume that beliefs and practices are necessarily desirable just because they are embedded within an existing culture, but rather they address the dilemmas of preserving or innovating cultural aspects to provide for the expansion of broadly shared material and nonmaterial benefits. As the sustainability of the multiple aspects of development becomes the principal focus of development, the question of culture and its role in the change process becomes critical. This book is an effort to provide a broad empirical basis for such a conversation.

The editors wish to thank the university's founder and the founder of the PBRC, Daisaku Ikeda, as well as the administration of the university from the president, Daniel Y. Habuki, on down for their generous support and encouragement over the rich but brief (15-year) life of the center.

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Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Tables

CHAPTER 1

Rethinking Culture and Development

Patterns of Change and Persistence

William Ascher and John M. Heffron

How do globalization and development strengthen—or threaten—the prospects of cultural persistence and vitality? Under what circumstances do these forces erode the cultural foundations that provide people with the sense of belonging and distinctiveness that protects their pride, self-worth, and general coping skills? Under what circumstances can development and globalization serve the positive function of weakening those cultural practices and beliefs that deprive people of their human dignity? What aspects of culture have the barely recognized capacity to shield people from the positive and negative impacts of globalization or expose them further to these impacts? These are the concerns addressed in this chapter and the subsequent chapters of this volume, with specific focus on the accelerating pace of globalization and our concern to protect and enhance the human dignity of all who are affected by it.

Each of the essays in this volume point to one overriding conclusion: there is a need to rethink the connection between culture and development. Scholars, aid workers, and cultural informants do not only increasingly contest the meanings and significance of these two terms; the connection itself, always a tenuous one, has been further attenuated by new forces of globalization. These forces both shrink and expand individual choices, with potentially fatal consequences for traditional notions of the meaning of culture and development. If we are to explore the impacts of development on culture, and vice versa, we will need to start with a definition of culture that captures the complexity that has made working with the concept so difficult.[1] We recognize there are two levels of

cultural practices and beliefs that are important to distinguish for the analyses that follow.

The broader level consists of all the practices and beliefs that are distinctive in comparison with other societies. Thus, fishing with one type of net as opposed to another is an element of "economic (or production) culture"; believing that a citizen ought to be highly politically active is a form of "political culture." By this broad definition, these practices or beliefs qualify as "cultural" just as much as the forms of dance, music, and visual art that we normally think of as constituting the core elements of a culture.

A second, more narrowly circumscribed level of cultural practices and beliefs is that of arts and language. "Arts" include performance arts, such as dance and live theater, as well as the creation of tangible objects such as paintings, poems, and novels. One justification for distinguishing this relatively restrictive set of practices and beliefs from all the rest is that the critics of globalization often point to the erosion or disappearance of distinctive arts and language practices as a major loss that globalization imposes, failing to notice the larger patterns of persistence. Another justification is that much of the support that goes to preserve culture is targeted to maintaining distinctive artistic and linguistic patterns. Thus, when people talk about "preserving culture" they are typically referring to this narrower conception of culture.

While we can and must make this distinction, it is important to recognize, first, that the boundaries of the narrower definition are not sharp. There is "artistry" in many activities that have primarily material ends, such as culinary arts or how fishers decorate and throw their nets. Moreover, cultural practices and beliefs that do not fall within the category of arts and language often have major impacts on the narrower set. For example, the "political culture" belief of nationalism (however the nation's boundaries are defined) may reduce the attachment to subnational, ethnic arts and language. Or, the shift from one set of economic practices to another may either increase or decrease the time available for people to engage in artistic pursuits. Another complicating factor is that the status of being "within a society" has become less clear. We are all increasingly members of a "global society," while at the same time every individual is of many "societies" and "cultures," some nested within others. For example, not only are Indonesian Chinese part of Indonesian society, but they also have important elements of distinctiveness that warrant recognizing an "Indonesian Chinese" society and culture. Therefore when we speak of individuals with the resources to change "their culture" or "their society," the referent is by no means obvious.

The wide variation in how cultural beliefs and practices can be affected by outside forces is yet another reason for preferring a broad to a narrow definition

of culture. On the one extreme, we can focus on the specific issue of what direct efforts to preserve or change cultural practices or beliefs are justifiable. On the other extreme, we can focus on changes in modes of production, political forms, education, and so on, that will have impacts on both the broad definition of culture as the entire set of distinctive practices and beliefs and the narrower set of arts and language. Somewhere in between these two extremes lays the mundane, day-to-day struggles of a people and its culture to reconcile external pressures to change with internal demands to stay the same—demands issuing not only from its conservative elders but also from its radicalized youths.

Finally, the problem of culture and its definition is complicated by the growing analytical distinction between globalization and modernization, the former tending toward a multidimensional, the latter toward a one-dimensional interpretation of development. The concern over the impact of globalization on values, human dignity, and the preservation of valued cultural practices is not new,[2] but much of the older analysis of intercultural influences in the second half of the past century was understandably preoccupied with the impact of the West on the rest of the world.

The phenomenon of globalization has gained not only enormous scholarly attention in recent years, it has also led to the rediscovery of culture as a unique source of human meaning and purpose, reviving in the process an old debate over the virtues of modernization.[3] This is an important event. It was culture in the Bismarckian sense of *Blut und Erde* (blood and iron) that gave rise to the organic unities of twentieth-century fascism and to some of the greatest crimes against humanity in the history of the world. Race and biology became the watchwords of a nineteenth- and twentieth-century conception of culture that placed it at odds not only with the new democratic faith but also with civilization itself. In the psychoanalytic idiom of the day, culture was a kind of neurosis, the outward manifestation of infantile fantasies of omnipotence and the wellspring of our worst instincts of authoritarianism. In the hands of ambitious leaders, culture became the new legitimacy, both forgiving and permitting everything in its name, while declaring open war against the rule of reason in human affairs.

Modernization, on the other hand, was going to be the great leveler, its uniform set of economic policy prescriptions—"stabilize, privatize, liberalize"[4]—to serve as an antidote to the manifold ills associated with culture: its irrational appeal to narrow group loyalties, exacerbation of race and ethnic hatreds, glorification of "the general will," and suppression of the individual. An urban-industrial order (supported by a scientific, agricultural one) tended over by an army of technocrats whose loyalty was not to any one people or group but to the abstract, transcendent principles of the modern state would hold in check those rash, underworld forces of cultural particularism. Those forces were then

unleashed by romantic nationalism and by a process of decolonization beginning after World War I and extending well into the twentieth century. In its earliest iterations, modernization theory drew heavily on the Western backlash against culture. Much of the earlier literature either turned a blind eye to or dismissed culture as an element of backwardness antithetical to structural growth and development. Perhaps the most representative example of this latter view was Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (1958), which made the ability to achieve "empathy" with the personality traits of advanced Western societies a necessary precondition for modernization.[5]

Not until the publication in 1973 of Shmuel N. Eisenstadt's *Tradition, Change, and Modernity* did scholars begin to question the application of a grand theory of modernization, often construed as Westernization, to all cases in the developing world. "It would be wrong," Eisenstadt concluded, "to assume that once these forces [of modernization] have impinged on any 'society' they naturally push forward to a given, relatively fixed 'end plateau.' Rather, as we have seen, they evoke within different societies in different situations a variety of responses depending on the broad set of internal conditions of these societies," culture being, at the very least, one of those "internal conditions."[6] It became apparent to a later generation of intellectuals and policy makers, especially in face of the East Asian Miracle, that the early architects of modernization theory were tilting at windmills. Fears of a generalized, reactionary Kulturkampf were greatly overexaggerated; progress and tradition were not antithetical to one another but rather, in given historical circumstances, could be mutually reinforcing. In *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns* (1963), the anthropologist Clifford Geertz questioned the wisdom of development planning that "takes place in deliberate ignorance of the very social and cultural processes which it is supposedly concerned to transform."[7] In Marxist terms, the modernization of societies, of whatever form, could no longer separate basic aspects of economic production (the division of labor, property rights, owner-worker relations)[8] from the shape and character of the society and culture built on this base.[9]

Anthropologists and ethnographers have long been interested in processes of cultural change and persistence, but even they have tended to view culture as a closed system and change as endogenous, a response primarily to local rather than translocal forces of influence. Resistance, not accommodation, they maintain, has been the norm in relations between insiders and outsiders. Wherever the latter occurs, disasters await—in the form of alienation, anomie, and cultural implosion. Perhaps the most famous example of this paradigm is Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Culture Change* (1945), but it is also found paradigmatically in Ralph Braibanti and Joseph J. Spengler, *Tradition, Values,*

and Socioeconomic Development (1961), and much more recently in Larry L. Naylor, *Culture and Change: An Introduction* (1996). A recent exception to this trend is George Spindler and Janice E. Stockard, eds., *Globalization and Change in Fifteen Countries* (2007). Although sensitive to the ways in which identities are "invented, negotiated, resisted, and lost" in the face of globalization, the editors—as their subtitle, "Born in One World, Living in Another," suggests— nevertheless view development as generally toxic for culture, leading to loss of autonomy, out-migration, and the erosion of traditional rites and rituals.[10]

With the work of such critical theorists as Pierre Bourdieu in sociology, Arjun Appadurai in anthropology, and Amartya Sen in economics, interest in the relationship between culture and development has both deepened and broadened in recent years. Three new edited volumes—Susanne Schech and June Haggis, eds., *Culture and Development: A Critical Introduction* (2000), Sarah A. Radcliff, ed., *Culture and Development in a Globalising Society: Geographies, Action, and Paradigms* (2006), and Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, *Culture and Public Action* (2004)—cover a large amount of ground. Yet with the exception of the latter work, edited by two economists at the World Bank, the material is largely of a descriptive nature, drawing on the insights into development of such fields as geography and demographics and integrating work in development with cultural studies.

This broader treatment of the significance and impacts of development arises, in part, from the global shift that has changed what development means from a cultural standpoint. Over the past three decades, the particular form of modernization that held sway in the first three or four decades following World War II has given way to the broader and much more complex phenomenon of globalization. In its initial formulation, modernization was essentially a one-way transmission of economic and cultural influence, bringing (and in some cases, imposing) practices and beliefs from the economically advanced countries to the poorer countries. The supplicants to the West for aid, technology, and national security were heavily exposed to Western, and largely American, culture, which was strongly associated with success. Cultural mimicry of the "haves" by the "have-nots" was an understandable reaction in the developing regions, and even in the defeated Axis powers. The Soviet Union, more specifically Russia, developed its own cultural sphere in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, bringing the Russian language, marginalization of religion, and particular modes of social interactions to areas that previously had very different linguistic, economic, political, and social patterns.

In contrast, "global" is far less synonymous with "American" or "Western" than "modernization" was in previous decades. Globalization involves a much more intricate, multidirectional, cosmopolitan pattern of influences. These are driven not only by economic globalization but also by the exploding access