

**THE PRODUCER, THE CONSUMER, & THE SOCIAL SCIENCE  
PRODUCT IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

It must be welcome news for countries suffering an adverse term in the terms of trade between their agricultural exports and their industrial imports to learn that for one of their local industries, the production of social science knowledge, "the balance of trade in ideas" has turned in their favor. This is one of the major messages in *Social Sciences & Public Policy in the Developing World*, a book of linked essays edited by Laurence D. Stifel, Ralph K. Davidson, and James S. Coleman. Most of the contributions were presented at an international conference Italy in of "Strengthening Social Science Capacity in the Developing Areas" held at Bellagio, the fall of 1980. However well organized such a conference was, and however devoted the editors of such a book were, the diversity of creative output by the various contributors is so great that no short review will be able to do justice to the whole work. So I will characterize each of the contributions briefly, then examine at greater length a theme or thesis of special interest drawn from each of the three major sections of the book.

At the outset it must be said that this is a work of quality. The editorial troika is almost uniquely qualified by past experience for the task they have undertaken. Many Thai social scientists will know of Laurence D. Stifel, now vice president and secretary of The Rockefeller Foundation, who served for ten years as an economic advisor and project leader in Thailand. Ralph K. Davidson, another economist, is deputy director of the Social Sciences Division of The Rockefeller Foundation. James S. Coleman, a political scientist with over a dozen years of experience in Africa, is well known as one of the intellectual godfathers of the "modernization paradigm" which was central to so much of post-war American social science regarding the area in view. The ten other chapter authors provide a similar level of competence in a somewhat more international cast. (In addition to five North Americans, there are three from Latin America, one from Africa, and one from China.)

Internationalization is the central theme of Part I, and it takes pride of place both in the editors' introduction and in the bold and imaginative Chapter One essay by Kenneth Prewitt, the president of the Social Science Research Council. Briefly put, this theme is composed of three parts : 1) a continuing critique by

social scientists of the South of the social science knowledge imported from the North, 2) a reassessment by Northern social scientists of the products they have been exporting, and 3) "the emergence of a new, genuinely international community of social-science scholars who accept the facts that there are enduring dimensions of cultural relativity..." Prewitt's handling of this theme will be analyzed in greater depth below.

Along with this celebration of internationalization the editors' introduction raises cautions concerning the erosion of standards under pressure of the governmental consumer. They also decry the diversion of research from more profound social questions to short-term problem solving and the atrophy of the critical function of scholarship. They conclude their introduction with the lament that, "external funding for the general support of the social sciences is declining sharply at a time when investment resources for development are enormous, disillusionment with conventional strategies of development widespread, and the recently launched social science enterprise in most countries not yet effectively institutionalized."

The second chapter is a reprint of a reprint of a much quoted article by Paul Streeten, a development economist, who explains the legitimacy as well as the limits of the Developing World's critique of Western social science. The section concludes with a case study of The Rockefeller Foundation as an agency of diffusion. It provides a fairly full description and frank assessment of a twenty year engagement with university development in selected locations, including Bangkok.

Part II examines the state of the profession of social science in its regional diversity. There are two chapters on Latin America, one on East Africa, one on West Africa, one on China's post Cultural Revolution reconstruction, and a sensitive and interestingly provocative piece by Warren Ilchman on the social scientists of Southeast Asia, to which we shall return.

The applications of social science research and the influence that consumers have on producers are the twin foci of Part III. A locally respected foreign political scientist, Myron Weiner, surveys the policy relevant social science output of India and makes some critical recommendations in an article that was originally published in India. Edgardo Boeninger, an economist and former rector of the University of Chile, analyzes the interrelations of ideology and empirical science in the context of various institutions, in both democratic and non-democratic settings. The Rockefeller Foundation representative in East Africa, David Court, decries the long run consequences of the inundation of Kenyan and Tanzanian social scientists with consultancies to government and short term research contracts. The book ends with a carefully annotated bibliography as an aid to further consideration of the many issues raised in the essays.

The simple demographics of the internationalization of social science are indisputable. Not only has world population doubled in the post-war period, but the population of full-time professional social scientists in universities and research institutes in many developing countries has grown to reach a critical mass that supports a self-sustaining community of scholars. To one who has returned to Bangkok after twenty years to secular trend is patent. Whether the impact on the world market of the aggregate product of this maturing infant industry lives up to the claims made by Kenneth Prewitt in "The Impact of the Developing World on U.S. Social-Science Theory and Methodology" is less clear. He writes (p.3), "The consequences of internationalization in the last three decades.... are potentially as transforming for social science as the introduction of quantification in the prior three decades..."

This heady assertion is supported by, among others, the argument that there has been a "growing modesty on the part of American scholars and growing maturity on the part of Third World social scientists..." In the early post-colonial dawn American scholars with their paradigms and field research funds seemed to dominate the foreign research site and monopolize the sale of intellectual technology in the former colonies. Now that some of the West is red (at least in the form of a Marxist flavor in social science), and post-prandial remorse has set in following attempts to digest some of the earlier main line studies, Parsonian universalism and the modernization paradigm are in disfavor and modesty is in fact growing in the American groves of academe.

The other part of the argument is that the growing maturity of Third World scholars, "expresses itself in the development of indigenous hypotheses to account for local conditions, in the tendency to export as well as import ideas and methods (dependency theory being the classic illustration), and in the scepticism shown toward some Western social science." (p.6) Two qualifying, but non-fatal, questions may be raised about this statement : 1) is the development of indigenous hypotheses to account for local conditions really something new, that is, were there no ideas exported from the South along with the spices, sugar, rubber, and South commodities of an earlier time 2) is dependency theory truly an export of the other or is the North merely reimporting in reassembled form a commodity most of whose components were originally manufactured in the North?

In answer to the first question, every public administration student could cite the 19th century's Northcote-Trevelyan Report as an idea for fundamentally improving the home civil service which the United Kingdom imported from India. More recent and quite relevant are two cases from Southeast Asia in the inter-war period. Consider John S. Furnivall, who, though not born in Burma, was notably indigenized (he nurtured the nationalist movement in the '30's) and produced in Easternail so a readily exportable concept : the plural society. J. H. Boeke did not

serve as much time in place (less than 30 years in the East Indies), nor was he so much appreciated locally, but his concept of the dual economy, which subsequently shaped so much thinking in development economics, was not something thought up in an Amsterdam coffeeshop. In addition to their admission to the canon of cosmopolitan social science, both of these concepts from before the World War II were put to use in rather severely altered form to explain domestic conditions in the United States when social science turned inward during the 1960's and '70's.

My answer to the second question, the provenance of dependency theory, is less certain because I am neither a habitual user of the concept nor a specialist in the region of its fullest flowering. Perhaps it will be sufficient to quote a currently respected application and celebration of the theory, Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil*, Princeton, 1979. In his basic [theoretical] chapter [Evans] sets out the following genealogy: from Hobson, to Lenin, to Baran, to "the founders of dependency theory," a quintet of Latin American sociologists, historians and economists plus the North American Andre Gundar Frank. (pp. 14-26)

To say that the internationalization of social science is neither so new nor so thoroughgoing as some claim is not to say that nothing important has happened. There has been a change in the concepts and intellectual frameworks by means of which Western and local scholars view Third World realities. Indeed, it is part of the very nature of science as a rational endeavor to change paradigms and refashion concepts. In addition, there are in Thailand, and in many other developing countries, significant communities of social scientists who are alive to cosmopolitan currents and able to make significant contributions on their own.

The crucial question for most of the audience of this Journal is, what are the forces advancing or impeding the growth and development of this community in Thailand? For that answer we must turn from the character of the social science product to the circumstances of the social science producers, as analyzed by Warren F. Ilchman in "Hybrids in Native Soil: The Social Sciences in Southeast Asia."

A central thesis of Ilchman's essay, which resonates in other chapters as well, could be stated baldly as "poverty in the pocket breeds poverty in the pen." With their relatively low pay and with little opportunity for scholarly exchange, Southeast Asian social scientists, he points out, are captivated by opportunities to do contract research of an applied, data dense, and theory thin variety which is neither cumulated nor communicated in any fashion that builds a body of knowledge or a community of science. It might be noted, parenthetically, that the development of individual expertise is especially eroded by a market that purchases from the same scholar a survey of rural credit facilities one day and advice on urban political mobilization or foreign trade strategy the next. Such undertakings are particularly deleterious when, as with so much evaluation research and so many of the feasibility

studies commissioned in the U.S., the purchaser of such research has primarily ritual rather than prudential purposes in mind, or when the intentions are sincere but the consumer is unable to judge the quality of the producer's output.

Ichman and the others note, of course, that more money could free scholars from mindless policy-relevance. In addition, "Southeast Asian social scientists ... need to develop a public tradition of research, a protected, public space where social scientists can share their findings, mutually educate, and acquire the constructive habits of peer criticism."

This sober critique does not imply that most social scientists are selling their souls for profit or position. In fact, Myron Weiner gives some striking examples of findings by research institutes in India that run counter to the vested interests of their sponsors. Thus, the Department of Prohibition in one Indian state commissioned a study of whether prohibiting the sale of alcohol shifted the consumption patterns of poor households toward better nutrition. An independent research institute discovered that the shift was from alcohol to gambling rather than to food. Consequently, the report was withheld from publication, which points to the question of relations between producers and consumers of social science research.

The ampersand that connects "Social Sciences" with "Public Policy" on the cover of the book belies the complexity of the interaction between consumers and producers that is analyzed within. Its main outline is a dialectic between two institutions -- universities and government bureaus. True, there are other actors in the policy process who may make use of social science knowledge; Boeninger examines in addition legislatures, political parties, the armed forces, religious bodies, trade unions, and private businesses. And there are research departments within government agencies, though Boeninger points out that they labor under limitations that are "incompatible with serious scientific activity," (p. 263)

Good social science requires institutions that have both autonomy from and support from government. Money is not enough, and in some circumstances, money is too much. Social scientists must be free to construct a self-critical community. They must also be both free and disciplined enough not to do work of such quality that it were better not done. This problem is not unique to the developing world. Wherever there is rapid growth, the scientific community faces the same risk as does the economy, that the growth may be growth without development.

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