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COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE USES OF TRADITION: ROBERT REDFIELD AND ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF MODERNIZATION DURING THE COLD WAR*

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The history of the rise and fall of “modernization theory” after World War II has been told as a story of Talcott Parsons, Walt Rostow, and other US social scientists who built a general theory in US universities and sought to influence US foreign policy. However, in the 1950s anthropologist Robert Redfield and his Comparative Civilizations project at the University of Chicago produced an alternative vision of modernization—one that emphasized intellectual conversation across borders, the interrelation of theory and fieldwork, and dialectical relations of tradition and modernity. In tracing the Redfield project and its legacies, this essay aims to broaden intellectual historians’ sense of the complexity, variation, and transnational currents within postwar American discourse about modernity and tradition.

On 13 December 1948, University of Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield boarded one of the last American flights to depart Beijing before the armies of Mao Zedong took control of the city. Redfield had arrived in China only two months earlier to lecture on the “functions of social science” at National Tsing Hua University and to begin fieldwork in Chinese villages alongside his friend and fellow anthropologist Fei Xiaotong, a supporter of the communists in the Chinese civil war. Redfield’s visit to China was indicative of his aspirations for intellectual exchange and research across national, cultural, and ideological boundaries.¹ In

* I would like to thank Charles Capper, Daniel T. Rodgers, Hugh West, Eric Yellin, and three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on previous versions of this essay.

¹ Robert Redfield to Lisa Redfield, 9 Nov. 1948, Box 1, Folder 14, Robert Redfield Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (hereafter RRP);

the 1940s, he had begun to fashion a vision of the global role of social scientists in the postwar world: they would reveal the role of “tradition” in modernization. For Redfield, the establishment of a peaceful modern world depended, in part, on cosmopolitan intellectuals who both understood and could translate local traditions into universal human values to guide modern life. Instead of a unilinear process of westernization, Redfield envisioned modernization as a “dialogue of civilizations” in which each world civilization worked toward modernity through the interpenetration of its own “little” and “great” traditions and interaction with the outside world.² Although the swiftly changing currents of the Cold War swept away some lines of communication, such as in China, Redfield soon drew a transnational group of social scientists to his vision of modernity.

Redfield’s name is rarely mentioned in intellectual histories of postwar modernization or, indeed, in many accounts of postwar American social science. His absence from the postwar narrative can be explained in part by his reputation as an interwar pioneer of modernization theory. Perhaps best known as the scholar who reintroduced European social theory into the reigning Boasian historicism of US anthropology, Redfield has been credited with coining the term “modernization” in US social science. Through ethnographies of the Mexican village of Tepoztlán and the Yucatan peninsula in the 1920s and 1930s, Redfield developed the concept of the folk–urban continuum and established himself as one of the first US social scientists to conceptualize the contours and dynamics of rapid social change in non-Western areas.³ His career after World War II, in which he altered both his scholarly priorities and his conceptions of the nature of tradition and modernity, has been largely overlooked.⁴ His imprint on scholars

Wen-tsoo Wu to Robert Redfield, 21 March 1949, Box 7, Folder 3, RRP; Fei Hsiao-tung (Xiaotong) to Robert Redfield, 22 May 1948, Box 7, Folder 3, RRP.

² In 1949, Redfield predicted that China would “modify” Marxism and free-enterprise principles to match its own long-standing “ideals of life.” Robert Redfield, “Visit to China,” *University of Chicago Magazine* 42 (1949), 20.

³ The term first appears on page 4 of Robert Redfield, *Tepoztlan, a Mexican Village* (Chicago, 1930). For histories that identify Redfield’s interwar scholarship as a model for later modernization theorists see Clifford Wilcox, *Robert Redfield and the Development of American Anthropology* (Lanham, MD, 2006); Jordan Kleiman, “Modernization,” in Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg, eds., *A Companion to American Thought* (Oxford, 1995), 462–4. Howard Brick, *The Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), 48–9, positions Redfield as the originator of a “Chicago school” of modernization distinct from a “Harvard school” led by Parsons but does not examine Redfield’s postwar work.

⁴ Neither of Redfield’s two biographers devotes much attention to the comparative-civilization project. Wilcox, *Robert Redfield*; Kathryn Kadel, “Little Community to the World: The Social Vision of Robert Redfield, 1897–1958” (unpublished PhD thesis, Northern Illinois University, 2000); Andrew Sartori, “Robert Redfield’s Comparative

at the University of Chicago, who in the 1960s deviated from some of the central assumptions of paradigmatic modernization theory, has been occluded by a singular focus on that paradigm.

The story of the rise and fall of modernization theory is, by now, a familiar one to intellectual historians. In the 1950s and 1960s, social scientists centered around the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Comparative Politics, the Harvard Department of Social Relations, and the MIT Center for International Studies sought to use their expertise to both understand and guide what they imagined as a universal process by which societies became modern. Drawing from Enlightenment and Victorian theories of progress and evolution, they assumed that each society's development followed a linear path from one transhistorical bundle of cultural, economic, and political attributes, known as "tradition," to another bundle, known as "modernity." Tradition was typically equated with economic backwardness and cultural values inimical to industrial capitalism and parliamentary democracy; modernity mirrored the image and aspirations that postwar American liberals had for an idealized United States. They hunted eagerly for critical variables—urban living, factory work, mass media, and achievement motivation among them—that might accelerate the passage to modernity. In doing so, they aimed to construct not only a grand theory of social change, best embodied by the work of Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons, but also predictive and prescriptive models that US policymakers could use to guide "underdeveloped" nations toward an American-style future and away from the supposedly distorted termini of Soviet and Chinese communism.

By the end of the 1950s, their pursuit of modernization had catalogued a discouraging thicket of obstacles to modernization, notably the stubborn persistence of traditional psychologies and cultural beliefs. The acids of modernity (and state-led development) were less powerful than the "grip of tradition."⁵ The most influential work of modernization theory, *The Stages of Economic Growth* by the economist Walt Rostow, was an outlier to the emerging canon, in both its confidence about the modernization process and its choice of

Civilization Project and the Political Imagination of Postwar America," *Positions* 6 (1998), 33–65, has examined the project as a case study in the Cold War uses of area studies knowledge. John S. Gilkeson, *Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886–1965* (Cambridge, 2010), 218–37, has written on Redfield's postwar "turn to history" and his interest in "civilization" as a conceptual category.

⁵ Edward Shils, *The Intellectual between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation* (Hague, 1961), 19. For a representative cataloguing of the obstacles see Everett E. Hagen, "The Process of Economic Development," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 5 (1957), 193–215.

economic capital over sociocultural variables as the motor of social change.⁶ Yet even this simplified formula proved an unworkable guide for policymakers. Social-scientific theories of wholesale social change had lost their limited purchase in policymaking circles by the mid-1960s. As US hopes for development faded in favor of technocratic and military solutions to famine, population “bombs,” and peasant revolution, modernization theorists found themselves attacked by academic critics on the left and the right.

The criticisms of modernization theory began to draw parameters around the topic of modernization, ones that erased Redfield and his collaborators from the story. Almost all of the critics were sociologists and political scientists who pointed to intellectual simplifications and ideological assumptions within their own disciplines.⁷ Neither Redfield nor other anthropologists who devoted their scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s to modernization, such as Clifford Geertz and Lloyd Fallers, were included in their criticism. Redfield’s particular disdain for technocratic modernity and his interest in cosmopolitan exchange and the dynamics of tradition fit awkwardly into a portrait of US social scientists shoehorning nation states into a Eurocentric teleology of economic progress. His relative disinterest in problems of economic development or communist revolution meant he became a target neither of critics on the left who implicated social scientists in US imperial projects nor of those on the right who disputed the ability of social science to engineer development and pro-American democracies.

In focusing on the American context of modernization theory, historians have also too often have missed a wider picture of American social-scientific engagement with the question of global modernity in the years after World War II.⁸ An alternative vision of modernization—one that emphasized

⁶ Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* (New York, 1960).

⁷ One prominent exception was the economic historian Andre Gunder Frank. Andre Gunder Frank, “The Sociology of Development and the Underdevelopment of Sociology,” *Catalyst* 3 (1967), 20–73; Donal Cruise O’Brien, “Modernization, Order, and the Erosion of a Democratic Ideal: American Political Science, 1960–70,” *Journal of Developing Studies* 8 (1972), 351–78; Alejandro Portes, “Modernity and Development: A Critique,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 8 (1973), 249–79.

⁸ Intellectual historians have traced the domestic origins of social-scientific visions about the Third World, documented tensions and debates among theorists, and examined the institutional formations and social practices upon which theory was built. Historians of US foreign relations have investigated the political uses of modernization ideologies and the hand that social scientists played in policymaking about the Third World. On the rise and fall of postwar modernization theory see Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003); Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 44–65. On the social practice of postwar theory building see Joel Isaac, “Theorist at Work: Talcott Parsons and the Carnegie Project on Theory, 1949–1951,” *Journal of the History of*

intellectual conversation across borders, the interrelation of theory and fieldwork, and dialectical relations of tradition and modernity—could be found in the postwar scholarship and international collaborations of the anthropologist Robert Redfield.

This essay examines the alternative discourse of modernization that emerged through the work of Redfield and the Comparative Civilizations project at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. The project produced no defining manifesto about the nature of modernization. Indeed, Redfield rarely used the terms “modernization” or “modernity” in his work. But in their transnational project to compare the world’s “great living civilizations” as a means to uncover universal values that would unite the contemporary globe, Redfield and his colleagues grappled with intellectual and political problems at the core of paradigmatic modernization theory, namely how to conceptualize the nature of tradition and how to ensure global stability in a world of cultural difference and social change.

Redfield and his Chicago colleagues departed from the practices and assumptions of the modernization theorists in several respects. They made important intellectual connections with scholars beyond the American academy, most importantly in India. Redfield conceived of social scientists as world citizens, “rooted” cosmopolitans who held national loyalties but aimed, through scholarly inquiry and exchange, to both interpret and transcend cultural and national particularism.⁹ Scholarly exchange, Redfield argued, must be grounded in ethnographic studies of specific, local communities. Although removed from fieldwork himself by the 1950s, Redfield eschewed the quantification of broad sample studies and coded group data in favor of individual fieldwork by his principal collaborator Milton Singer and a younger generation of anthropologists. The dialectic between empiricism and theory helped Redfield reimagine the relationship of tradition and modernity. Where modernization theorists tended

Ideas 71 (2010), 287–311. For histories that emphasize the connections between social science and US foreign policy see David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ, 2010); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); Joel Isaac, “Tangled Loops: Theory, History, and the Human Sciences in Modern America,” *MIH* 6 (2009), 397–424.

⁹ I borrow the term “rooted cosmopolitans” from political theorists who have in recent years examined the historical and contemporary contours of cosmopolitan and national identity. On “rooted” cosmopolitanism see Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis, 1998), 91–114; David A. Hollinger, “Not Universalists, Not Pluralists: The New Cosmopolitans Find Their own Way,” in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, eds., *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, Practice* (Oxford, 2002), 228–39; Pratap Bhanu Mehta, “Cosmopolitanism and the Circle of Reason,” *Political Theory* 28/5 (Oct. 2000), 619–39.

to view tradition as a precursor and obstacle to modernity (societies overthrew one for the other), Redfield and his colleagues conceptualized tradition as a dynamic and invented construct in its own right, one with the cultural power to smooth and speed the project of becoming modern.

In returning Redfield to postwar debates about modernization, I aim to contribute both a deeper understanding of Redfield's later career and a broadened sense of the complexity, variation, and transnational currents within postwar American discourse about modernity and tradition. The priorities and methods of Redfield and his colleagues, from the United States to India, were different from those of the social scientists gathered around Parsons or Rostow. But they were not unconnected. Like the modernization theorists, Redfield's cosmopolitan dreams and search for universal values also drew upon the assumptions and beliefs of mid-century liberalism. Redfield did not wish to remake the world in the image of the United States, but his hope for modernity rested to a great degree on the actions of Western and westernized intellectuals like himself. Their universal claims, as historian David Hollinger has noted, were locally situated.¹⁰

But if Redfield held this cosmopolitan ideal as an article of faith, he subjected his own theoretical framework to searching analysis. Here, too, he influenced social scientists more closely tied to the mainstream of modernization theory. By the late 1950s, Redfield's work had made its imprint on scholars like Geertz, Edward Shils, David Apter, and Robert Bellah, whose concerns revolved more directly around economic and political development in the "new states" of Asia and Africa. Through fieldwork and theorizing, these scholars questioned the image of a generic traditional society where cultural values had to be overcome. As they struggled to build a more complex theory of social change, some, like Geertz and Bellah, came to abandon the project altogether.

Redfield would not live to see the unraveling of the postwar discourse about modernization: he died of leukemia in 1958. But in one of his last essays, he began to question whether his theories of tradition and modernity offered a relevant lens on a contemporary globe "increasingly characterized by a worldwide way of life that tends to obliterate what is local and traditional." Redfield labeled the phenomena "modernization" and "post-civilization."¹¹ Later generations of theorists often termed it "globalization." It was not a future he anticipated with any pleasure.

¹⁰ David A. Hollinger, "How Wide the Circle of the 'We'? American Intellectuals and the Problem of the Ethnos since World War II," *American Historical Review* 98 (1993), 317–37.

¹¹ Robert Redfield, "Civilization," in *Human Nature and the Study of Society: The Papers of Robert Redfield*, vol. 1, ed. Margaret Redfield (Chicago, 1962), 414.

* * *

Redfield's career as a theorist of modernization can be characterized broadly into three phases: the folk–urban phase, the comparative–civilizations phase, and the India phase. From the late 1920s through the early 1940s, Redfield's search for scientific generalizations about contemporary social change reinvigorated the tradition–modernity polarity in American social science. From World War II through the mid-1950s, Redfield moved away from studies of universal processes toward a historical engagement with particular civilizations in search of commonalities through comparison. Finally, at the end of his career and life, Redfield and his collaborators sought to use India, the *locus classicus* of thinking about tradition and modernity, as a field through which to understand the place of tradition in the modern world.

Redfield began his scholarly career sanguine about the scientific nature of anthropology but disquieted by the condition of modernity. His visions of science and civilization were first nurtured in and around the great industrial city of Chicago. Born in 1897 to a corporate lawyer and the daughter of a Danish diplomat, he attended the experimental and rigorous Laboratory School founded on the University of Chicago campus by the philosopher John Dewey. He spent his summers at his family's country house. This regular sojourn developed in him both a fascination with the observations of the naturalist and sensitivity to the impact of the city on its hinterlands. Redfield studied biology at the University of Chicago, and, following a stint as an ambulance driver at the front in World War I, returned to consider a career in the laboratory. He found laboratory life, with its focus on the repetition of controlled experiments, unappealing, and casting about for an alternative profession, took a law degree and entered his father's downtown firm. Practicing law left him bored and restless and, by 1925, he returned to the university to study anthropology. The decision was largely the result of his marriage to Margaret Park, who drew Redfield into the intellectual orbit of her father, the eminent urban sociologist Robert E. Park.¹²

Chicago's emerging school of sociology was critical to the genesis of Redfield's theoretical approach and research agenda. In its combined Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Park and his colleagues were transforming the discipline of sociology through the application of ethnographic fieldwork and an insistence on scientific neutrality. They exhorted their students to view the metropolis as a “social laboratory” with which to understand “the process of

¹² Kadel, “Little Community,” 15–52; Eric Wolf, “Robert Redfield,” in Sydel Silverman, ed., *Totems and Teachers* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2004), 178–9.

civilization.”¹³ Chicago school pioneer W. I. Thomas explained social change by figuring the city as the cauldron of modernity and the peasant as the traditional subject transformed through a process of social disorganization and adaption.¹⁴ Park brought to the Chicago school a belief, drawn from social theorists Emile Durkheim, Henry Sumner Maine, and Georg Simmel, that the critical transformation in human society involved a shift from small intimate communities to larger cosmopolitan societies joined by bonds of interest and contract. A disciple of Dewey and William James, Park also hypothesized that social change occurred when men on the margins of society injected new subjectivities, ideas, and values into a dominant culture. Park and Redfield spoke constantly in the 1920s, and Park imparted to his son-in-law his evolutionary dualism, ambivalence about progress and its metropolitan terminus, and habit of international travel. He encouraged Redfield to apply sociological concepts to the case of modernizing people in rural Mexico, the place Redfield had selected for his own fieldwork.¹⁵

Over the next twenty years, Redfield worked to craft a nomothetic science of social change, beginning with his study of the village of Tepoztlán, in the shadow of Mexico City. Redfield’s central interest was in how, and to what extent, “civilization” had penetrated village life. He concluded that, facilitated by an advance guard of villagers who adopted urban technologies and beliefs, “folkways” were steadily crumpling under the onslaught of modernity. Tepoztlán was a community in transition, caught between the traditional and the modern. Published as *Tepoztlan, a Mexican Village*, Redfield’s study bore the clear imprint of Park’s theories about marginal men and social disorganization as well as Redfield’s own extensive readings in the folkways concept of Henry Sumner Maine and the *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* typologies of Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. In each of these typologies, the rise of industrial civilization constituted a tragic loss of communal solidarity. Later modernization

¹³ Redfield took courses with anthropologists Fay Cooper-Cole and Edward Sapir, but sociology dominated anthropology in the combined department. Robert E. Park, “The City as Social Laboratory,” in T. V. Smith and Leonard D. White, eds., *Chicago: An Experiment in Social Science Research* (Chicago, 1929), 1–19, 3. Robert E. Park, “Human Migration and the Marginal Man,” *American Journal of Sociology* 33 (1928), 881.

¹⁴ W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Chicago, 1920).

¹⁵ In addition to early graduate studies in Germany and travels in Europe as secretary to Booker T. Washington, Park spent the last years of his career traveling and lecturing in the West Indies, Hawaii, China, India, and Brazil. On Park and the Chicago school see especially Fred H. Matthews, *Quest for an American Sociology: Robert E. Park and the Chicago School* (Montreal, 1977). On Park’s influence on Redfield see Wilcox, *Redfield*, 22–32.

theorists would recast these typologies into rosier picture of progress, but Redfield maintained throughout his life a sense of pathos about the costs of modern life.

Tepoztlan favored ethnographic detail over social-scientific abstractions. In 1930, Redfield embarked on a decade-long, multisite study of the Yucatan peninsula in pursuit of firmer generalizations about the nature of social change and civilization and the value of heuristic types. He helped develop the concept of “acculturation,” postulating that social change occurred through sustained “culture contact,” syncretism, and cultural fusion.¹⁶ Increasingly, Redfield came to perceive this culture mixing to be as much a psychological and ideational process as it was a technical one. Where Redfield’s first Yucatan report defined “civilization” as “schools, roads, and economic exploitation,” by the late 1930s he was characterizing “folk culture” and “urban civilization” as contrasting sets of worldviews that organized the psychological life of communities. In the Yucatan, Redfield selected four communities for study—a tribal area, a village, a town, and a city—and arranged them along a “folk–urban continuum” anchored by polar ideal types. The “folk society” was defined by its isolation, cultural homogeneity, personal and familial ties, and sacred beliefs; the city by its economic and political ties to a wider world, cultural heterogeneity, impersonal relations, and individualistic and secular orientation. Measured against these ideal types, the close and comparative study of real-life communities was meant to sharpen hypotheses about social change.¹⁷

Redfield’s interwar work exerted an enormous intellectual influence, both within anthropology and in wider studies of modernization. *Tepoztlan* catapulted him to national attention. Its rural romanticism attracted writers and journalists who contrasted the intimate bonds of the Mexican village with the soullessness of modern American civilization.¹⁸ Within anthropology, it helped launch the subfields of peasant and acculturation studies. Following Redfield’s lead, other anthropologists began to reimagine their discipline as relevant to the study of contemporary problems. Within sociology, the folk–urban continuum became a central organizing frame for many postwar studies of urbanization in non-Western areas. Redfield’s work was not, however, without its critics. His Chicago colleague Sol Tax argued that similar Mayan communities in Guatemala did not fit the folk pattern Redfield identified in Mexico. Anthropologist Sidney

¹⁶ Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits, “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation,” *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936), 149–52.

¹⁷ Robert Redfield, “Culture Changes in Yucatan,” *American Anthropologist* 36 (1934), 62; *idem*, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* (Chicago, 1941); *idem*, “The Folk Society,” *American Journal of Sociology* 53 (1947), 293–308.

¹⁸ See, for example, Stuart Chase, *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* (New York, 1931), which compared Tepoztlán and Muncie, Indiana, as studied by the sociologist Robert Lynd.

Mintz critiqued Redfield's largely ideational model of culture for ignoring the central place that plantation agriculture, tied to an international economic system, had in shaping life along the Yucatan peninsula. Most famously, Oscar Lewis restudied Tepoztlán in the late 1940s and found not Redfield's organic community but a village riven by factions and struggling with material privation and disease.¹⁹ Redfield acknowledged these critiques, but none of them caused him to fundamentally rethink his scholarly project.

It was instead the catastrophic events of World War II and the domestic and international repercussions of the Cold War that transformed Redfield's pursuit of modernization and launched a new phase of his intellectual career. In the 1930s, Redfield produced one of the foundational books of what would become the modernization paradigm, yet he remained aloof from politics and political uses of his scholarship. Steeped in interwar social science's prevailing scientism and idealization of objectivity, he demurred about drawing policy implications from his research. The social scientist created knowledge that could "by others be made of practical use," he explained in 1933.²⁰ In the 1940s, political crises pushed him to abandon his vision of anthropology as a value-free discipline, to reimagine social science as an investigation of universal moral values by cosmopolitan intellectuals, and to see that investigation as central to the pursuit of world peace. In the process, Redfield came to reimagine modernization.

By the 1950s, he had merged his intellectual and political commitments into an alternative theory of social change. Where he once saw civilization as a single, linear end point of modernization, he now looked to the great "living civilizations" of the world—defined by him as China, Japan, India, Islam, and the West—as separate sources for a shared humanistic tradition. Each of these civilizations contained elements of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Each had developed a "great tradition" of art, philosophy, and moral inquiry out of continuous interplay with the "little traditions" of their folk societies. The ultimate measure of any society's modernity, Redfield now believed, was not economic development, technology, or particular legal or political structures. It was instead the ability of its people to fashion moral values by integrating their own great traditions and new ideas. And world peace depended on the process.

¹⁹ Sol Tax, "Culture and Civilization in Guatemalan Societies," *Scientific Monthly* 48 (1939), 463–7; Sidney W. Mintz, "The Folk–Urban Continuum and the Rural Proletarian Community," *American Journal of Sociology* 59 (1953), 136–43; Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied* (Urbana, IL, 1951).

²⁰ Robert Redfield, "The Maya and Modern Civilization," *Scientific Monthly* 37 (1933), 111; Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941* (Durham, NC, 1994).

Although his father had been active in Democratic Party politics, Redfield remained largely distant from political activism until middle age. In the 1940s, he found his political voice, speaking out in print, public speeches, and on the radio about the “crises of our time.” To Redfield, these included racism, the triumph of materialism over moral principle in US culture, and McCarthy-era abridgments of free speech. But it was the US decision to unleash atomic bombs on Japan that convinced him that “the problem of world peace is now the overwhelming problem of mankind.”²¹ Redfield was horrified and haunted by the idea that the world’s capacity for technical destruction had outstripped its moral framework for coping with such awesome power. Along with hundreds of other prominent intellectuals, he took up of the cause of world government and the idea, enshrined in the constitution of the United Nations Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”²²

At the center of Redfield’s conception of modernity was a particular brand of cosmopolitanism that shared affinities with, and departed in important ways from, the routine “cultural internationalism” of the day as well as the political project of Cold War area studies. Cultural internationalism was not new to the postwar years. In the wake of World War I, as intellectuals reconsidered the dangers of nationalism and their complicity in stoking it, a number of US scholars and foundations promoted efforts at intercultural understanding through citizen and scholarly exchange. Programs like junior year abroad and the Rockefeller-sponsored “international house” on Redfield’s own Chicago campus aimed to deprovincialize the education of the United States’ leading citizens and future leaders.²³ Yet it was the modern intellectual who was seen as best capable of developing the cosmopolitan perspective necessary to forge new global standards of justice and peace. More than international goodwill, world peace required experts who could identify and overcome the parochialisms of ethnicity and nation.

These interwar efforts were largely a transatlantic affair in which “civilization” was reflexively equated with Europe.²⁴ By the 1940s, a new generation of postwar cosmopolitans yearned for a universal moral framework that rose above

²¹ Robert Redfield, “Consequences of Atomic Energy,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 27 (1946), 221; Kadel, “Little Community,” 231.

²² Julian Huxley, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy* (Washington, DC, 1947), 5.

²³ Liping Bu, *Making the World Like Us: Education, Cultural Expansion, and the American Century* (Praeger, 2003); Whitney Walton, “Internationalism and the Junior Year Abroad: American Students in France in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (April 2005), 255–78.

²⁴ Two notable exceptions were the Institute of Pacific Relations, founded in 1925 to further peace through scholarly connections across the Pacific, and to a lesser extent the

the cultural particularities of the West. Like Redfield, many had taken from anthropology the lessons of “cultural relativism,” that each culture was but one expression of human behavior and society.²⁵ At the same time, the atrocities of World War II had recommitted intellectuals to the goal of universal human rights. Calls for diversity and dialogue across cultures came coupled with a faith in transcendent moral values. Redfield and cosmopolitans like Julian Huxley, Gunnar Myrdal, and Pearl Buck argued that one first needed education in cultural differences in order to perceive deeper structures of shared morality. Only broad study that communicated “understanding of other ways of life,” Redfield wrote in 1947, promised to free a person from the parochial cage of his own culture. “A real and deep acquaintance [with another culture] is a release of the mind and the spirit from that isolation. It is to learn a universal language.”²⁶ The international commission that released the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 also predicated realization of its sweeping list of rights on “a common understanding of these rights and freedoms.”²⁷ Universal rights and commensurable cultural knowledge were inextricably tied.

In the late 1940s, cosmopolitans like Redfield joined this instrumental vision of cultural difference to a new project for the international production of cultural knowledge. Through international forums like UNESCO, social scientists attempted to construct what historian Perrin Selcer has called the “view from everywhere,” an international perspective “necessary to integrate diversity in an interdependent world.”²⁸ Scholarly comparison of different cultures promised to reveal the “universal language” of cultural values and then to serve as a model for the transnational interaction of ordinary people.²⁹ Cosmopolitan intellectuals

International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, which increased its non-Western membership in the 1930s. On interwar cultural internationalism see Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, 1997); Daniel Laqua, “Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order,” *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011), 223–47.

²⁵ Historian David Hollinger has called mid-century anthropologists “the grand exemplars of cosmopolitanism.” David A. Hollinger, *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliations in the United States* (Madison, WI, 2006), 166.

²⁶ Robert Redfield, “The Study of Culture in General Education,” in *The Social Uses of Social Science: The Papers of Robert Redfield*, vol. 2, ed. Margaret Redfield (Chicago, 1963), 111, 113.

²⁷ Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York, 2001), 310.

²⁸ Perrin Selcer, “The View from Everywhere: Disciplining Diversity in Post-World War II International Social Science,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 45 (2009), 326.

²⁹ Robert Redfield, “Social Science in the Atomic Age,” *Journal of General Education* 1 (1947), 120–24, 123.

were thus simultaneously to represent their cultures on the world stage and, through the application of reason and science, to overcome them.

Lurking beneath the celebration of cultural diversity were palpable anxieties about popular will and unexamined assumptions about American hegemony. In this cosmopolitan ideal, traditions served as a platform for global stability only when translated and interpreted by experts. Moreover, the norms and institutional frameworks for international social-science engagement were built from the blueprints of mid-century US academia and its disciplines.³⁰

In the United States, the project of intercultural understanding was soon bound to Cold War efforts to secure US hegemony over a changing world through new programs in “area studies.” Redfield viewed the development with deep ambivalence. Although he condemned the Soviet state as totalitarian and promoted intercultural dialogue to “strengthen us just where we can be so much stronger than the Soviets,” Redfield criticized efforts in cultural diplomacy aimed at selling the American way of life to other nations.³¹ Though chairman of the first SSRC area-studies committee, he viewed the rise of area studies as a narrowing of liberal education to an effort to acquire strategic knowledge about world regions. Redfield shared with many US social scientists a belief in social-science expertise as essential to postwar problems. But in the late 1940s, he worked out a vision of social science and its uses that differed markedly from political aims and behavioralist methods emerging in new interdisciplinary consortiums like Harvard’s Department of Social Relations (DSR) and Chicago’s Research Center in Economic Development and Cultural Change.

Some of the differences were already apparent in contending essays on the importance of social science that Redfield and DSR founder Talcott Parsons published in 1947. Parsons envisioned social science as technical knowledge akin to the natural and physical sciences; Redfield depicted it as an interpretive art, one that combined the “depth and insight of humanistic scholarship” with the “proficiency and precision of science.” Where Parsons saw the social sciences as critical for social stability, Redfield imagined it as a means to social illumination, helping people to see the underlying moral frameworks and implications of their political choices. Finally, where Parsons exuded confidence

³⁰ Selcer, “View from Everywhere,” 314.

³¹ Robert Redfield, “Does America Need a Hearing Aid?” *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 Sept. 1953. M. Singer, “Robert Redfield’s Development of a Social Anthropology of Civilizations,” in J. Murtha, ed. *Anthropology: The Early Years* (St Paul, MN, 1976), 193–4. On the impact of the Cold War on cultural internationalism see especially Frank Ninkovitch, *The Diplomacy of Ideas: U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938–1950* (New York, 1981); Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe* (Princeton, NJ, 2001); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, CA, 2003).

about social science's capacity to yield general prescriptions, Redfield emphasized the essential contingency of social knowledge. Social science offered only "a series of understandings . . . ever expanding and ever undergoing modification," that could nonetheless help policymakers and citizens navigate the "perils and possibilities" of the atomic age.³²

Redfield solidified his commitment to a social science of moral inquiry as the deepening Cold War scrambled his own research agenda. When the Chinese civil war quashed his plans there in 1948, Redfield fled, hopscotching west through Hong Kong, Bangkok, Calcutta, Karachi, Alexandria, and Sicily before, in April 1949, he joined other University of Chicago faculty in an intellectual denazification program at Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt.³³ His friend and colleague Everett Hughes had persuaded him to lecture on the humanistic uses of social science. In Frankfurt, "among these battered and half-ashamed intellectuals," Redfield felt needed.³⁴

The "honest and frank" intellectual exchange encouraged him to pursue transnational scholarship as a moral and political endeavor. So too did the work of other University of Chicago colleagues across the Rhine at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. From sociologist Edward Shils's efforts to catalogue "tensions affecting intercultural understanding" to philosopher Richard McKeon's leadership of the UNESCO Committee for the Comparative Study of Cultures, projects multiplied around hopes for a world community founded on "a new humanism in which universality is achieved by the recognition of common values in the diversity of cultures."³⁵ Redfield supported these endeavors but soon recognized that most of the work offered little guidance for how social scientists might go about connecting their studies of particular cultures to universal values. How in practice did one identify shared moral principles within a diversity of cultures?

Returning to Chicago in the fall of 1949, Redfield found his answer in the comparative study of civilizations. The design of a new course on "Human Origins" offered an initial impetus to study societies in the *longue durée*. Seeking out the expertise of archaeologists and Egyptologists at the University's Oriental Institute, Redfield was drawn into discussions of a spate of new best-selling books

³² Talcott Parsons, "Science Legislation and the Social Sciences," *Political Science Quarterly* 62 (1947), 241–9, 241–2; Redfield, "Social Science in the Atomic Age," 122, 124.

³³ Robert Redfield to Lisa Redfield, 13 Feb. 1949, Box 1, Folder 14, RRP; Everett Hagen to Robert Redfield, 14 April 1949, Box 14, Folder 13, RRP.

³⁴ Robert Redfield to Margaret Park Redfield, 7 May 1949, Box 1, Folder 15, RRP.

³⁵ UNESCO Department of Cultural Activities, "Comparative Study of Cultures," 23 Nov. 1949, Box 18, Folder 13, Robert Redfield Cultural Studies Program Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (hereafter RRF).

on the rise and fall of civilizations.³⁶ Archaeologist V. Gordon Childe explored social and material developments in early human history. Historian Arnold Toynbee's multivolume *Study of History* identified twenty-six world civilizations, only ten of which he contended were still "living." And in *The Meeting of East and West*, philosopher F. S. C. Northrop delved into history to advocate for world understanding through a cross-pollination of "Eastern" and "Western" values. As European empires crumbled and nation states from India to Indonesia came into being, both scholars and a wider Anglo-American audience seized on the civilization frame. *Time* magazine even placed Toynbee on its cover.³⁷ One can see in the popularity of these works a search for a framework to make the postwar world legible, as well as the orientalist practice of constructing "the West" through opposition to an otherworldly "East." At the same time, a focus on world civilizations acknowledged, indeed emphasized, multiple sources of cultural power and influence in the world.³⁸

Redfield evinced little interest in paeans to the special virtues of the East. What excited him about the study of civilizations was its potential for uncovering similarity. Empirical comparative study of values and beliefs in each living civilization might reveal a universal process in all civilizations. But "a speculative philosopher without much special knowledge of particular societies" could not lead such an investigation, argued Redfield. What was needed was "objective investigations of particular societies combined with a disposition to reach comprehensive understandings of large matters." In other words, an anthropologist like Redfield himself had a special role to play.³⁹

In 1951, the Ford Foundation provided an initial grant of \$75,000 to Redfield's Comparative Civilizations Project to assess methodologies for studying civilizations and to encourage collaboration between humanists examining great

³⁶ The Oriental Institute was founded in 1919 with the mission of studying the "rise and development of civilization." Bruce Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon: The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life, 1880–1930* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 112–14.

³⁷ V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (New York, 1946); Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York, 1947); F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West: An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding* (New York, 1946); "Education: The Challenge," *Time*, 17 March 1947.

³⁸ Redfield was not the only US anthropologists to turn to the comparative study of civilizations. As John Gilkeson, *Anthropologists*, 208–18, notes, Alfred Kroeber also became interested in civilizations as "historical growths." In the late 1940s, Kroeber exchanged ideas with Northrop and Toynbee and lectured at Harvard on "Civilization as a Field of Comparative History."

³⁹ Redfield, "Social Science in the Atomic Age," 123; Robert Redfield to Robert M. Hutchins, 21 March 1951, Box 5, Folder 10, RRFF.

civilizations and social scientists studying cultural values.⁴⁰ Redfield chose as his project codirector Milton Singer, a thirty-eight-year-old Chicago philosopher whose specialization in the epistemology of the social sciences fit Redfield's own interest in heuristic categorizations of society. Singer, who had directed the college's core social-science curriculum, struck Redfield as an able administrator who had learned to think across disciplinary boundaries. Over the first two years of their collaboration, in what amounted to an intellectual division of labor, Singer inventoried studies of civilizations and values while Redfield developed hypotheses about the dynamics of civilization. In 1952, Singer crisscrossed Europe to interview sinologists, indologists, and Renaissance historians and made tentative plans to visit Latin America the following year. He also studied early results emerging from national character and value studies by US anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Redfield traveled to Cornell University, the Sorbonne, and the University of Uppsala in Sweden to lecture on the millennia-long "passage from precivilized to civilized life" and the various "forms of thought" that anthropologists used to conceptualize the "little communities" they studied.⁴²

Synthesizing historical accounts of the rise of cities and their "high" cultures of art and philosophy with anthropological data on tribal and peasant societies, Redfield produced no grand sociological model about the development of societies. His writings from this period nonetheless reveal how he was reassessing his categories of social analysis and forging a new vocabulary for talking about tradition and modernity. The first and most important break that Redfield made was in his vision of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Where his Central American studies had conceptualized these as temporal poles in which whole societies moved from one to the other, now Redfield recovered the vein in Tönnies that identified community and civilization as contrasting aspects of all societies. Even the modern metropolis was "an assemblage of part-folk societies" whose neighborhoods formed "little personal and moral part-worlds."⁴³ If city people

⁴⁰ Between 1951 and 1961, the foundation provided the project with \$375,000 in grants. The foundation's funding of the Redfield project came, in large measure, because of Redfield's professional connection and personal friendship with Robert M. Hutchins, former dean of the University of Chicago, whom the foundation's first president Paul Hoffman had chosen as his second-in-command in 1951. Robert Redfield to Robert M. Hutchins, 18 Dec. 1951, Box 5, Folder 10, RRFF; Francis X. Sutton, "The Ford Foundation: The Early Years," *Daedalus* 116 (1987), 41–91.

⁴¹ Document C. A List of Enterprises Already Begun, ca. March 1952, Box 5, Folder 6, RRFF.

⁴² Robert Redfield, *The Primitive World and Its Transformation* (Ithaca, NY, 1953), ix; *idem*, *The Little Community* (Chicago, 1955), 1.

⁴³ Redfield, *The Little Community*, 141–2; Robert Redfield, "The Natural History of the Folk Society," *Social Forces* 31 (1953), 225.

were communal, then peasants were part of civilization. Recasting his portrait of villages disordered by rapid social change, Redfield now emphasized continuity, resilience, and reciprocal cultural relations between village and city. The peasant village was “a stable structure” in which peasants held to their local “moral order” but came to depend on the city’s “technical order” of trade, economic specialization, and political institutions.⁴⁴ Both city and village shared a “primary civilization” of indigenous ideas and customs, and to a lesser degree a “secondary civilization” in which cultural beliefs and economic and political structures were altered by contacts with other civilizations, particularly that of “the West.”

The gesture to westernization was cursory. It was the indigenous traditions and ideas of the world’s “living,” primary civilizations that drew Redfield’s attention. Moving even further from materialist explanations of social change, Redfield now depicted civilization as an evolving “worldview,” the “habits of men’s minds” that were created and shared by all members of a particular region. Practiced in thousands of diverse little communities, this worldview coalesced into a collective “Little Tradition.” Cultivated and refined by indigenous priests and scholars in cultural centers, it formed a high culture, a civilization’s “Great Tradition.” Redfield hypothesized that each civilization arose through the continuous interaction of these little and great traditions, and that this was the way that the moral order changed over time. Civilization broke down old ways and stimulated new ideas and conceptions. For most of human history, this dynamic happened without explicit reflection or social engineering. But in a contemporary world of accelerating cultural exchange, modernity meant that man “construct[ed] himself and society by deliberate design.”⁴⁵ Global exchange offered new opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration and reform. It could also open the door to cultural conflict and a severing of social designs from the vital wellspring of tradition. To further modernity, one first had to understand tradition and its role in modernization.

In 1953, Redfield and Singer took stock of their efforts. Concluding that the dynamics of tradition on the ground were poorly understood, they resolved to refocus their project around anthropological studies of little communities in one civilization. The question was where. Central America, which Redfield had studied for nearly thirty years, would require them to grapple with the intermingling of European and indigenous cultural elements.⁴⁶ Searching for field projects under way in a civilization they imagined as unclouded by the

⁴⁴ Redfield, “The Natural History of the Folk Society,” 225.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 225, 228; Redfield, *Primitive World*, xi, 77–83.

⁴⁶ Robert Redfield, “The Social Organization of Tradition,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (1955), 17.

complexity of cultural syncretism, Redfield and Singer lit upon India.⁴⁷ A young Chicago graduate student, McKim Marriott, had been sending back reports of his fieldwork in a northern Indian village. Redfield and Singer found them fascinating. Equally exciting were Marriott's accounts of a wave of new fieldwork by young American, Indian, and British anthropologists studying in Indian villages.⁴⁸ Redfield and Singer knew almost nothing of India's history or its current conditions, nor did they have any professional contacts with Indian scholars. But in the early 1950s, the content of US scholarship about India was thin and the borders of what would become South Asian studies had yet to be forged. The handful of US universities with programs on India focused almost exclusively on the subcontinent as the birthplace of ancient language and religions.⁴⁹ There was, then, ample room for Redfield and Singer to enter the scholarly conversation about India, and, in doing so, to begin to shape it. "Let us devote [a] seminar exclusively to village India," Singer declared to Redfield.⁵⁰ Studying little communities and great traditions in India would be the first step to making generalizations about the world.

The choice of India had twofold significance for Redfield and Singer's work. First, it signaled a shift in their project away from theoretical hypotheses and historical research and toward the practice of contemporary fieldwork. Second, it would soon bring them into direct engagement with long-standing, and continuing, debates about the place of India in the modern world. With India, Redfield and Singer had selected perhaps the most important global site for the construction of theories of modernization. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theorists, from Karl Marx to Max Weber, had built evolutionary models of historical development on visions of Indian backwardness. Characterized as a continent of "otherworldly" religions and isolated, communal "village republics,"

⁴⁷ That they saw India as a pure civilization—and not as a product of thousands of years of migration, trade and conquest by myriad cultures and groups—spoke both to their ignorance of Indian history and to the state of US knowledge about India in the early 1950s.

⁴⁸ Although inspired by Redfield's own village studies, new anthropological interest in Indian villages was also the result of contemporary politics. Where the British had discouraged ethnography in villages, the new government of India, concerned about rural economic development, was eager for knowledge about the Indian village. McKim Marriott, "Roster of Some Social Anthropologists and Sociologists who have worked with Peasant Peoples in South Asia," c.1953, Box 12, Folder 8, RRF.

⁴⁹ Indology, the study of sacred Hindu texts, dominated the study of India in the United States prior to the 1950s. Joseph W. Elder, Edward C. Dimock Jr, and Ainslie T. Embree, eds., *India's Worlds and US Scholars, 1947–1997* (New Delhi, 1998), 19–27; Richard H. Davis, *South Asia at Chicago: A History* (Chicago, 1985), 1–5.

⁵⁰ Milton Singer to Robert Redfield, 14 Nov. 1953, Box 5, Folder 14, RRF.

India symbolized the challenges Europeans saw in modernizing the East.⁵¹ After the formation of an independent India in 1947, new visions of a modern nation competed with older images of asceticism, stagnation, and intractable poverty. The US social scientists who took up questions of economic and political development in the early 1950s held up India's ambitious development plans and secular parliamentary democracy as an exemplar to smaller developing nations who might be tempted to follow communist paths to modernity. The economic development of a "New India" was seen as a Cold War imperative.

Yet the problem of tradition remained. Would India's villages and religious beliefs and practices pose insuperable obstacles to development? Writing in the inaugural issue of the journal *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, the Chicago economist Bert Hoselitz emphasized "the obstinacy to which people hold to traditional values." Moreover, in nations such as India, independence had brought a heightened sense of nationalism and a prideful celebration of "highly inefficient methods of traditional Indian activity." Would the India of Mohandas Gandhi, an imagined nation of self-sufficient villages, eclipse the modern industrialized state envisioned by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru? Or would the assault on old values by modernizing forces disrupt and unmoor traditional societies, leaving them vulnerable to communist appeal?⁵² None of these questions occupied Redfield and Singer as they planned their Village India seminar. But in investigating India's little and great traditions, they were about to hook their project to central concerns of the paradigmatic modernization theorists.

In the spring of 1954, a dozen anthropologists arrived in Chicago to discuss the place of the village in a larger pattern of Indian civilization. They differed in theoretical orientations, methodologies, and the kinds of village they studied, yet the anthropologists all agreed that the Indian village was not, and had never been, a cultural or economic isolate. Long embedded in regional and continental networks of trade, migration, and successive waves of colonization, the little communities of India had come to share an Indic "worldview." The debate among the anthropologists was, rather, about the fate of tradition in light of contemporary changes. Some wondered whether "the school, the political party,

⁵¹ Marx's view of India did not remain constant. In his later writings, Marx altered his view that India lacked its own history, suggesting that developing communal connections might form a basis for resistance to capitalism. On Marx and India, see Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago, 2010), 13–28, 208–12; Thomas Metcalfe, *Ideologies of the Raj* (New York, 1995), 66–112.

⁵² Bert Hoselitz, "Non-economic Barriers to Economic Development," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1 (1952), 8–10; Morris Watnick, "The Appeal of Communism to the Peoples of Underdeveloped Areas," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 1 (1952), 22–36.

the movie, [and] the community plan” would ultimately engulf India in an inexorable tide of Westernization.⁵³ The answer, provided by M. N. Srinivas of M.S. University in Baroda, India, was a decided no. Through fieldwork in the independent Coorg kingdom and later in a village near Mysore city, Srinivas hypothesized that “Sanskritic Hinduism,” an all-India pattern of Brahmanic practices and beliefs, had for centuries provided India a mechanism for social mobility without cultural disruption. In a process he labeled “Sanskritization,” Srinivas described how lower castes of rising economic status could elevate their social position by taking on the Sanskritic Hinduism of higher castes. Sanskritization gave a “flexibility to the traditional social system” that “help[ed] preserve its forms.”⁵⁴ Sanskritic Hinduism provided India a common and enduring basis for its indigenous civilization.

Sanskritization captured the imagination of Redfield, Singer, and other US anthropologists as a theory that could explain both change and continuity. Bernard Cohn depicted the varying responses of two northern Indian village castes to economic changes as a double process of Westernization and Sanskritization: while the higher caste grew more lax in religious observance, the lower caste adopted more orthodox Hindu customs. David Mandelbaum agreed, arguing that he had observed such a process even among the more remote Kota tribe. Summing up the work in Chicago, McKim Marriott suggested that Sanskritization might provide the all-important key to the enduring relationship between the little and great traditions of India. Social change in India was “a movement toward an urban and cosmopolitan mode of life,” and it was a village “revival and penetration downward of ancient Hindu elements of culture and religion.”⁵⁵ This depiction fit Redfield and Singer’s hypotheses about the persistence of tradition. As Singer wrote to Redfield shortly after the seminar ended, “India is too sophisticated . . . to accept a linear view of progress.”⁵⁶ Increasingly committed to the study of India, first Singer and then Redfield decided to travel there themselves.

In November 1954, after months of talk of villages, Singer glimpsed his first sight of India in the wide boulevards and grand hotels of Bombay. The Village India seminar had examined little communities, but Redfield and Singer were also deeply interested in the role of cities and urban intellectuals in the formation of the Great Tradition. Building on Redfield’s distinction between

⁵³ McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago, 1955), ix, 36–52, 78–101.

⁵⁴ M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford, 1952); *idem*, “The Social System of a Mysore Village” in Marriott, *Village India*, 15.

⁵⁵ Marriott, *Village India*, xii, 53–77, 211, 225.

⁵⁶ Milton Singer to Robert Redfield, 14 July 1954, Box 10, Folder 1, RRF.

“primary” and “secondary” civilizations, they posited an analogous typology of “orthogenetic” cities, which nurtured the Great Tradition by defining its norms, and “heterogenetic” cities, which cultivated economic enterprise, absorbed outside ideas, and produced new modes of thought. Shanghai, Chicago, and Bombay served as customhouses to the outside world; Peiping, Kyoto and Benares synthesized the Great Tradition.⁵⁷ Searching for a way to study the Great Tradition in an orthogenetic city, Singer met V. Raghavan, chair of the Sanskrit department at the University of Madras. Raghavan described to Singer the role he believed peripatetic urban performers played in traveling out to villages to teach the Vedas and other Hindu epics and returning to the city with local beliefs that they refined into a “Vedantic synthesis.” The picture was “astonishingly close to Redfield’s approach,” and Singer, with rising excitement, buttonholed the Madras scholar to learn more. Raghavan in turn invited Singer back to Madras, where he promised to introduce him to the city’s community of Smarta Brahmins who, he explained, functioned as important cultural patrons of Sanskrit Hinduism. Madras, a bustling commercial center of one and a half million people, might have appeared an unpromising locale in which to search for indigenous tradition. Through Raghavan’s eyes, it was revealed as “a rich and complex cluster of Indian culture” where scholars, priests, and professional storytellers nurtured the Great Tradition through sacred books, a cultivated oral tradition, and a sacred geography of temples and pilgrimage sites. Four months in Madras convinced Singer that his academic future lay in the study of tradition in a modern metropolis.⁵⁸

Redfield was equally excited by Singer’s reports and soon began to incorporate the work of Srinivas and Raghavan into his analysis. While Sanskritization explained how peasants connected to “the great vedic tradition of India,” Raghavan’s urban “cultural specialists” offered a vital missing link in his own model for how civilizations flourished. Redfield began to see in the “relations between Muslim teacher and pupil, between Brahman priest and layman, between Chinese scholar and Chinese peasant,” a replenishing “structure of tradition” that lay at the very heart of civilization.⁵⁹ Long removed from fieldwork, he now resolved to go to India and examine the structure of tradition through a study

⁵⁷ Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, “The Cultural Role of Cities,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3 (1954), 53–73.

⁵⁸ Milton Singer, “The Great Tradition in a Metropolitan Center: Madras,” *Journal of American Folklore* 71 (1958), 347–88; V. Raghavan, “Variety and Integration in the Pattern of Indian Culture,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (1956), 497–505; Milton Singer, “The Cultural Pattern of Indian Civilization,” *Far Eastern Survey* 15 (1955), 25–6; Milton Singer, “Dr. V. Raghavan, a Personal Reminiscence.” Box 58, Folder 2, Milton B. Singer Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

⁵⁹ Redfield, “Social Organization,” 18, 20–21.

of temples, scholars, and teachers in the coastal state of Orissa. The location had been chosen in consultation with Indian anthropologists whom Redfield had brought to Chicago with funding from the Ford Foundation. In November 1955, he arrived in Calcutta only to be overcome by illness. A physician, detecting an abnormal white blood cell count, advised him to fly home immediately, where he was diagnosed with leukemia. Redfield continued his theoretical work on civilizations and scholarly exchanges with Indian scholars until his death in 1958, but the future of the project lay with Milton Singer.

Redfield's untimely death left a theoretically rich but ultimately incomplete and ambiguous legacy for those who followed him. Redfield's work on modernization was riddled with contradictions. He celebrated a progressive evolution toward universal modern values while mourning the social costs that urban life and modern capitalism exacted upon peasant communities. He depicted a universal historical trajectory from the "primitive" to "civilization" at the same time as he worked out a multicentric theory of change and persistence in great civilizations and their little communities. His brand of cosmopolitanism celebrated folk traditions while placing control and use of these traditions firmly in the hands of Westernized elites. Finally, he welcomed non-Western intellectuals into the conversation about modernization and borrowed from them intellectually. Yet, in these collaborations, Americans maintained control of US foundation funding and institutional prestige.

In all, Redfield's contradictions did not diminish the influence of his ideas about tradition and transnational collaboration. But Redfield's successors were far less ambivalent about the virtue of modernity and the necessity of examining the Cold War implications of modernization. Singer was less committed to Redfield's desire to uncover universal values through scholarly exchanges about tradition. Instead, his work on tradition in India began to pull the Redfield and Singer project closer to the central questions of the paradigmatic modernization theorists. In doing so, Singer confronted directly the claim by other US social scientists that tradition stood as an obstacle to modernization. In 1956, the political scientist Lucian Pye, in a study of guerilla communists in Malaya, argued that communism appealed to people who, having abandoned their traditional ways, found themselves "rootless" in the modern world.⁶⁰ Political danger lurked in the social disorganization that accompanied the transition from tradition to modernity. Others worried that non-Protestant cultures lacked the cultural capacity to make this transition in the first place. Following Talcott Parsons, a Weberian pessimism about the success of capitalism in "oriental" and "Catholic" societies pervaded US scholarly discussions of economic development. Drawing

⁶⁰ Lucian W. Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, NJ, 1956).

on his experience in India, Singer asserted that functional counterparts to Weber's Protestant work ethic existed in India. Contemporary Indians needed no schooling in Western religion, materialism, or social institutions. An indigenous "esteem for hard work, wealth-getting, and material prosperity" would provide the "psychological and moral motive forces needed for a democratic and nonviolent industrial development."⁶¹ Tradition provided a vital asset for industrialization. It also stabilized the passage to modernity. In contrast to Pye's portrait of rootless, in-between peoples, the work of Singer and other South Asianists emphasized the "underlying unity and continuity of Indian civilization" in the face of centuries of change. In a 1959 Festschrift to Redfield with essays by Srinivas, Raghavan, and twenty other Indian and American scholars, the Indologist W. Norman Brown captured the emerging picture of India's past and present: "She does not have to experience a violent conversion, get rid of her past at once, and suddenly become something different . . . Just as in the past it has always been changing, showing dynamic qualities, proving its adaptability, so today it may still be letting down new air roots from sound old branches."⁶² The South Asianists' dynamic tradition was, no less than the work of the paradigmatic modernization theorists, deeply political.

The portrait of civilizational unity and continuity forged by Singer and other South Asianists soothed deepening concerns among Americans and Indians about the political future of Nehru and his Congress Party. In Madras, tensions were rising between Dravidian populists and Brahmans, the backbone of the regional Congress Party. In neighboring Kerala, the Communist Party was strong. And in the capital, Delhi, Nehru and his government struggled to meet economic targets and avoid a looming debt crisis. Whether India's drive toward development would succeed, whether the Congress Party would maintain its grip on power, whether Nehru would turn to Moscow in the absence of sufficient US aid—these were the political currents that roiled underneath intellectual talk of great traditions and enduring civilizations. A unifying Great Tradition promised to temper political radicalism and overcome dangerous divisions of class, caste, and religion. In the "living heritage from the past," Singer argued, one would find the keys to the "New India."⁶³

⁶¹ John Goheen, M. N. Srinivas, D. G. Karve and Milton Singer, "India's Cultural Values and Economic Development: A Discussion," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 7 (1958), 10; Milton Singer, "Cultural Values in India's Economic Development," *Annals: American Academy of Political and Social Science* 305 (1956), 90–91.

⁶² W. Norman Brown, "Class and Cultural Traditions in India," in Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia, 1959), 39.

⁶³ Singer, *Traditional India*, xviii.

But whose heritage and whose past? The version of Indian civilization that emerged from the collaboration of Americans and Indians was distinctly Hindu and Brahmanic. The long history of Muslims in India and the histories of India's tribal peoples were largely brushed aside for an India unified by the cultural achievements of a Hindu aristocracy. In India, Redfield and Singer had forged their scholarly ties to a Brahman elite, and the past they enshrined as "Indian civilization" largely reflected their cultural and political prejudices. Scholars like Srinivas and Raghavan promoted Brahmanic traditions as the basis of Indian national identity. They drew upon orientalist visions of Hindu cultural essence in their postcolonial battles to define the nature of modern India. Srinivas downplayed caste, class, and religious conflict to emphasize cultural cohesion through Sanskritization. An outspoken Hindu nationalist, Raghavan employed academic and public platforms to place Hinduness, or *Hindutva*, at the center of India's national identity.⁶⁴ Tradition was a political project under construction, as much as a social reality to be uncovered.

The selection of elite Brahmanic cultural practices to stand for all India was emblematic of the synecdoches and intellectual lacunae of Redfieldian modernization. While they depicted tradition as a shared cultural endeavor, Redfield and Singer gave privileged position to intellectuals in the cultivation and refinement of culture. Just as globetrotting, cosmopolitan scholars were key to the contemporary search for modern values, so were traveling scholars and priests essential to the work of defining the great traditions. In Redfield's vision, the intellectual and moral life of the masses remained perpetually incomplete without the teaching and reflection of elites. Ostensibly, the scholars in the postwar exchange about civilizations were equal. In fact, the celebration of "exchange" elided differentials of power in the relationship between the Chicago scholars and Indian scholars. Redfield and Singer controlled Ford Foundation funding that they dispensed as grants to Indians with far fewer resources. They also asked Indian scholars to be always, and simultaneously, cosmopolitan and parochial in their interactions. Scholars like Srinivas and Raghavan were to be cosmopolitans, transcending their culture in the science of theory building. At the same time, Redfield and Singer needed them to be culture-bound field guides to India. Yet the Indian scholars themselves were often as removed from their subjects as the Americans. Srinivas, a product of Oxford and a privileged childhood in Mysore City, admitted that village India was "terra incognita" to him as he launched

⁶⁴ Mary Hancock, "Unmaking the 'Great Tradition': Ethnography, National Culture, and Area Studies," *Identities* 4 (1998), 343–88; Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 60–89.

his fieldwork.⁶⁵ Redfield acknowledged that “personal interests and personal and cultural values” colored social-scientific investigation, yet he and Singer remained silent about power and privilege within international scholarly communities and between investigators and their subjects.⁶⁶

Perhaps the most glaring omission in Redfieldian modernization was the absence of material relations or structures of political economy in the production of culture. For Redfield, “peasant” was a cultural status and civilization a shared constellation of ideas about the world. There was almost no sense of how worldview might be shaped by the experience of work, one’s position in agrarian economies, or historical trajectories of colonization and global capitalism. By the 1970s, anthropologists like Eric Wolf and James Scott would reexamine the concept of the peasantry to emphasize how “[d]istinctions of property [and] relation to markets” shaped peasants’ worldviews. Peasants were no longer collaborators with elites in a continuous and cohesive cultural whole; they were people with their own collective consciousness, rebelling against systems of political and economic exploitation. Steeped in moral economies, Wolf’s and Scott’s peasants were champions of economic rights, a category of universal values about which Redfield, so focused on free speech, cultural pluralism, and other mid-century US liberal aspirations, was largely silent.⁶⁷

In their elitism and inattention to the role of modern capitalism in molding “traditional” societies, Redfield and Singer were quite similar to the paradigmatic modernization theorists. Historian Nils Gilman has documented the “resolute antipopulism” of such groups as the SSRC Committee on Comparative Politics and the MIT Center for International Studies, whose members saw their analyses as helping Third World elites to become “mandarins of the future.”⁶⁸ In his critique of modernization theory, Immanuel Wallerstein argued that a pervasive liberal ideology, reflecting the “easy and unquestioned economic hegemony of the United States” in the 1950s and 1960s, blinded US social scientists’ to the historical construction of underdevelopment. Nations were not discrete entities undergoing a similar process at different times in history, but interconnected and unequal parts of a single system, a capitalist world economy that had first

⁶⁵ M. N. Srinivas, “Practicing Social Anthropology in India,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997), 3.

⁶⁶ Redfield, *Little Community*, 136.

⁶⁷ Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969), xi; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT, 1976).

⁶⁸ The phrase, belonging to communication specialist Ithiel de Sola Pool, a key member of the MIT group, is quoted in Gilman, *Mandarins*, 8.

cohered in the sixteenth century.⁶⁹ Wallerstein offered no comments about the civilizations of Redfield and his collaborators, but his point might have applied equally to their model of discrete and parallel cultural systems.

Yet in describing the years 1945 to 1970 as a period of “exceptional obscurantism” and national insularity in US social science, Wallerstein missed the Redfield project and its transnational connections, support of ethnographic fieldwork, and dialectical understanding of tradition and modernity.⁷⁰ For all the ways that Redfield’s cosmopolitan ideal fell short in execution, he and Singer nonetheless forged a transnational community of scholars around the study of India. From his work in China with Fei Xiaotong in 1949 to his last trip to India in 1955, Redfield engaged continuously with the world as he grappled with the nature of social change. Most of the paradigmatic modernizationists gathered data through large-scale sample surveys or deduced the future of Third World modernization by studying the European or Japanese past. Redfield and Singer insisted on building a general model of social change through intensive field experience in contemporary places. Redfield was eager to push for universal conclusions from the study of India’s villages and cities. This proclivity toward generalization did not, however, keep him from reexamining his own theoretical categories and models. His postwar scholarship involved not only a partial repudiation of his earlier theory building but also a continuous search for the ways in which “tradition” produced and shaped the modern. In this work in the 1950s, Redfield began carving out a path that other social scientists would pick up as new in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The legacies of the Redfield and Singer project could be seen most clearly in the field of South Asian studies, where the study of India as a civilization of great and little traditions challenged, and partially usurped, an earlier focus on ancient languages, caste, and kinship. But Redfieldian modernization also made its imprint on new efforts to craft a theory of modernization in the 1960s. A year after Redfield’s death, an interdisciplinary Committee for Comparative Study of New Nations (CCSNN) formed at the University of Chicago came to be seen as “the most powerful group of minds working on development.”⁷¹ CCSNN joined Redfield and Singer’s methodologies and interest in the uses of tradition to the priorities of the modernization school. CCSNN was Parsonian (and Weberian) in its theoretical orientation and Rostovian in its desire to apply

⁶⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, “Dependence in an Interdependent World: The Limited Possibilities of Transformation within the Capitalist World Economy,” *African Studies Review* 17 (1974), 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷¹ Arthur Stinchcombe, “*Politics of Modernization: Review*,” *American Sociological Review* 31 (1966), 267.

social-scientific analysis to US foreign policy. Dreamed up by sociologist Edward Shils, anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and political scientist David Apter, CCSNN aimed to produce “realistic, sympathetic studies of the new states . . . to make our policies toward them . . . more helpful.”⁷² Its creators had all spent the 1950s as students or colleagues of Parsons, Rostow, and Marion Levy, a key figure in the SSRC Committee for Comparative Politics.⁷³

Yet from the start CCSNN differed from other centers of modernization theory in its insistence that general categories and hypotheses be grounded in field research. For all the calls for knowledge of non-Western areas, the first generation of modernization scholars subjugated fieldwork to theory building. Parsons, Gabriel Almond, and Marion Levy sent their students to Asia, Africa, and Latin America to gather empirical data for their models. Once in the field, these students attempted to fit their mentors’ theoretical frameworks onto their empirical data. But eventually field experience challenged grand theories built at home. This was especially true for anthropologists who dominated CCSNN. From Geertz to Lloyd Fallers, Manning Nash, and three former Redfield collaborators, McKim Marriott, Bernard Cohn, and Milton Singer himself, the Chicago committee became a magnet for a new ethnographic approach to modernization. Celebrating the anthropological focus of the committee, David Apter told Fallers, “with all you political-sociological-cultural-personalitical anthropologists around, it should fairly hum!”⁷⁴ CCSNN aimed to join the anthropologist’s “intimacy” with “living societies” to a systematic comparison of new nations.⁷⁵ Thus, for all the new ideas, if one substituted “civilization” for “nation,” the methodological structure was remarkably similar to the design of the Comparative Civilization Project.

Methodology was not the only continuity between Redfield’s project and the new efforts in Chicago. In the 1960s, scholars connected to CCSNN examined the question of the relationship between tradition and modernity and recast the portrait of tradition as a universal pattern of values and behaviors that posed an obstacle to development. In the hands of various CCSNN members, traditions were depicted as diverse and historically situated ideas, practices,

⁷² Edward Shils, “On the Comparative Study of New States,” in Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York, 1963), 8.

⁷³ By the late 1950s, Shils had begun his own research on the role of Indian intellectuals in conceptualizing and furthering modernization in India. He traveled to India to conduct interviews with various Indian intellectuals on their attitudes and experiences. Edward Shils, “The Culture of the Indian Intellectual,” *Sewanee Review* 67/2 (1959), 239–61; *idem*, *The Intellectual between Tradition and Modernity: The Indian Situation* (The Hague, 1961);

⁷⁴ David Apter to Lloyd Fallers, 6 Feb. 1960, Lloyd A. Fallers Papers, Box 2, Folder 7, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

⁷⁵ Shils, “On the Comparative Study of New States,” 9.

and institutions that persisted, often in reinvented forms, in order to ground contemporary economic and political development.⁷⁶ In their study of Indian politics, entitled *The Modernity of Tradition*, CCSNN members Susanne Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph stressed continuities between values and structures of the past and the emerging “modern” forms of the 1960s. They concluded that the ruling Congress Party drew strength from instrumental uses of traditional loyalties, while traditional social groups such as caste associations flourished in India’s parliamentary democracy. Tradition and modernity in India were “dialectically rather than dichotomously related.”⁷⁷ By the late 1960s, Singer’s field research in Madras had led him to similar conclusions. Studying Madras’s observant Hindu business leaders, Singer found men who inhabited two spheres at once: a work sphere in which they followed a “modern culture” and a domestic sphere where they conformed to traditional ways of living. Traditional customs offered emotional and spiritual sustenance that observant businessmen used to energize their economic lives.⁷⁸

What was striking about CCSNN was how much of its reexamination of tradition drew from its members’ work on India. Redfield and Singer had helped transform the University of Chicago into the premier center of South Asian studies in the United States, and CCSNN reflected this institutional interest. Reviewers recognized the Rudolphs’ *Modernity of Tradition* and Singer’s *When a Great Tradition Modernizes* as deliberate revisions of the tradition–modernity polarity in US social science. India was central to this work. Drawing on theory building that began with Redfield and Singer’s Village India seminar, CCSNN members Marriott and Cohn also pioneered the concept of the “invention of tradition” by national governments and colonial states. Every national culture, Marriott concluded, was “a product of modern manufacture.”⁷⁹ As Marriott and particularly Cohn followed the Redfieldian path toward studies of the constructed nature of knowledge and culture, other scholars sought to bury the modernization school with evidence from India. In 1967, Joseph Gusfield, a Chicago PhD and sociologist of Indian political groups, penned the first sustained

⁷⁶ David E. Apter, “The Role of Traditionalism in the Political Modernization of Ghana and Uganda,” *World Politics* 13 (1960), 45–68; Lloyd Fallers, “Equality, Modernity, and Democracy in the New States,” in Geertz, *Old Societies*, 158–219, 197; E. Shils, “Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1972), 122–59.

⁷⁷ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, 1967).

⁷⁸ M. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (New York, 1972).

⁷⁹ M. Marriott, “Cultural Policy in the New States,” in Geertz, *Old Societies*, 56; B. S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *Invention of Tradition* (New York, 1983), 165–210.

attack on modernization theory by drawing on the work of Singer, the Rudolphs, Marriott, and Srinivas.⁸⁰

Efforts to complicate the concepts of tradition and modernity might have led to an intellectual crisis and an explicit repudiation of the categories themselves. Sociologist George Homans described his disenchantment with Parsonian theory as an act of “coming to my senses.”⁸¹ More often, however, the journey of US social scientists out of modernization theory involved disillusionment with its Whiggish promise and an embrace of new problems and conceptual vistas. CCSNN chairman Geertz and the sociologist Robert Bellah were emblematic of the ways in which US social scientists abandoned the pursuit of modernization. Both students at Harvard’s DSR in the 1950s, they took up the Weberian question of the relationship between religion and economic development, Geertz through fieldwork in Indonesia and Bellah through study of eighteenth-century Japan. Each uncovered traditional values and institutions that supported economic development while assuming a normative end point for social and economic change. One reviewer remarked that Geertz, who tacked between critiquing the simplifications of “Gemeinschaft vs. Gesellschaft” and employing the nomenclature of Rostow’s stage theory of growth, appeared to be “struggling to free himself from the rigid straitjacket[s]” of Weber, Parsons, and Rostow.⁸²

Rather than find a conceptual escape, Geertz, Bellah, and other modernization scholars gave up on the project. In the late 1960s, authoritarianism and stalled development in the Third World as well increasing doubts about the Vietnam War and poverty and racism within the United States led some scholars to conclude that the condition of modernity was even more fraught than the problem of modernization.⁸³ By 1970, without drawing on Redfield explicitly, both Bellah and Geertz left modernization theory through humanistic doors Redfield had opened: Bellah took up the question of the moral values of community, while Geertz drew anthropology toward the study of culture as text. Reflecting their times, these projects were each, in their own way, far more circumspect about the

⁸⁰ Joseph R. Gusfield, “Tradition and Modernity: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change,” *American Journal of Sociology* 72 (1967), 351–62.

⁸¹ George C. Homans, *Coming to My Senses: An Autobiography of a Sociologist* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1984).

⁸² Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-industrial Japan* (Glencoe, IL, 1957); Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns* (Chicago, 1963); E. M. Brunner, “*Peddlers and Princes*: Review,” *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966), 258.

⁸³ Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World* (New York, 1970); Lloyd Fallers, “The Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations,” c.1973, University of Chicago, Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations Records. Box 4, Folder 9. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

political uses of culture. Redfield in 1950 had sought to uncover universal values from a world of traditions; Bellah in 1970 believed that Americans needed first to examine their own moral lives. While Geertz turned to humanist epistemologies to make anthropology an “interpretive [science] in search of meaning,” he was little interested in philosophical questions about the good life.⁸⁴ The semiotics of thick description had no social-engineering designs.

Beyond scholarly salons, the rise and fall of modernization theory was neither a story of Redfield and Singer’s project nor the work of Geertz, Bellah, and others examining the nature of tradition. Instead, the image of modernization theory was, and remains, Walt Rostow’s *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto*. Published in 1960, two years after Redfield’s death, Rostow’s manifesto aimed to demonstrate through economic history that every industrialized nation had followed the same set of stages to “self-sustaining” growth. Provided developing nations avoided the “errors” of Marxism and Soviet development, Rostow promised that all “traditional societies” could engineer an economic “take-off” leading to the final, permanent stage, “the age of high mass consumption.” While genuflecting to the sociocultural conditions necessary to bring societies to the point of take-off, the critical element of Rostow’s model was a “big push” of capital investment and government planning.⁸⁵ In Rostow’s formulation, concerns about values and tradition were swept away in favor of a seemingly clear set of policy recommendations. Rostow’s stages model “sent a shaft of lightning through the murky mass of events which is the stuff of history,” noted one approving reviewer.⁸⁶ In 1961, Rostow moved from MIT to the Kennedy administration, where his language of “take-off” and support for development aid helped shape US foreign policy. But Rostow’s model also had international purchase. Orbiting the globe in a variety of translations, *Stages* captured the imagination of Third World economists, politicians, and policymakers as a way to set their nations on the path to abundance. Redfield had dreamed of an international conversation about the shape of modernity, but it was Rostow who succeeded in creating an international vocabulary of modernization.

Had Redfield lived to review Rostow’s book, he would have likely found little that fit his own theoretical or ethical dispositions. In his later career, Redfield disparaged stage theories of evolution and complained that a fixation on material abundance had blinded Americans to the moral foundations of modernity.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 5; *idem*, “An Inconstant Profession: The Anthropological Life in Interesting Times,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002), 8–9.

⁸⁵ Rostow, *Stages*, 7, 38, 149.

⁸⁶ Harry Schwartz, “Nations Have Their Phases,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1960, BR6.

⁸⁷ Redfield, *Little Community*, 141.

Furthermore, he admitted to being “puzzled” by the “misconception” that the ideal types of tradition and modernity were taken as “an assertion of things found to be always true about real primitive societies, real cities, or real people.” Tradition and modernity, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, were only heuristics, “imagined constructions,” that helped pose questions but did not answer them.⁸⁸ In Rostow’s stages, social scientists and policymakers had accepted the ideal type as a description of a universal social reality. Yet in disavowing the misuse of ideal types, Redfield refused to acknowledge the enormous intellectual and cultural power of the categories “traditional” and “modern.” Redfield saw them as mechanisms for ordering and opening up scholarship about social change in the postwar world. By the late 1960s, it had become clear to many social scientists that the concepts had instead trapped them into a particular way of imagining the world. Social scientists had attempted their own uses of tradition and modernity. The ultimate legacies of Redfield, Rostow, and postwar modernization were how beguiling such concepts were to use, and how difficult they were to give up.

⁸⁸ Redfield, “Folk Society,” 224.