

Culture, Education and Development

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In the field of economic development, there are two major schools of thought; a classical one that sees development as a process driven by the market forces; therefore, for a society to develop, it needs only to activate the market forces. The other school is a cultural one that sees culture as a hindrance to development rather than a force of change. In other words, the first school tends to look at economy as a separate aspect of life, hardly connected to the other aspects, while the second tends to see culture as a value system that governs people's attitudes and ways of thinking that hardly changes over time. Consequently, no school is able to see the totality of life conditions in society and articulate a plan to transform both the sociocultural and economic aspects of life.

Generally speaking, classical theorists tend to emphasize economic restructuring, but largely ignore the role culture plays in the development process. Traditions, values, religious beliefs, attitudes, and social and political structures affect change in society, both negatively and positively. Culture influences labor productivity and discipline, as well as workers' willingness to learn new skills and work hard, as well as the way people view work and time. Therefore, if attitudes view work, time and material gain positively, culture will have a positive impact on development; if attitudes affect work, time and material gain negatively, culture will play a negative role in the development process.

John Kenneth Galbraith wrote about twenty years ago, "If we look around the world today we see no country with a literate population that is poor and no country with an illiterate population that is anything but poor." There is no doubt that literacy increases the knowledge of people, but knowledge alone cannot transform workers' attitudes in a positive way; and if attitudes do not change, workers' productivity would not change either. In fact, if education comes with the wrong attitudes, it can hinder social change and make development more challenging. Therefore, education is not enough by itself to make workers and economies

competitive; educated workers and employees need also to have the right attitudes to be productive and responsible; otherwise, education is more likely to become a liability, not an asset. And there are many cases where education has become a liability spreading corruption and hindering sociocultural transformation and economic development.

On the other hand, people who see time as a liability, as most people throughout history did, tend to emphasize the past and deemphasize the future. In contrast, people who see time as an asset tend to emphasize the future and deemphasize the past. Since the past represents our collective memories, giving priority to memories may help us avoid facing challenges of the future, and waste our time thinking how to revive the long lost “golden age.” But history of the past has no valid wisdom to give, or valued experience to emulate; thus, living its fantasy makes the future a fate to be accepted, not a project to be consciously constructed. In fact, no progress can be made by focusing on the past; only keeping an eye on the future and viewing time as a challenging challenge can help us build a better, more enjoyable future for generations to come. Thus, people who fail to recognize the value of time and the imperatives of the times they live in are unable to visualize and conceptualize a promising future for their children and grandchildren.

Wherever and whenever time is perceived as an asset, people tend to make the best use of the time available to them. And by so doing, they are able to make substantial progress in all areas of human endeavor, and get more enjoyment from life. And wherever and whenever time is perceived as having little or no particular value, people tend to waste most of it. And by so doing, they fail to develop their economies and societies and make progress. And wherever and whenever time is perceived as a liability, people tend to feel happy wasting a good portion of their lives and money to get rid of time.

Due to a unique life experience, I can see why both schools have failed to identify the causes of underdevelopment; and why they lack a vision to overcome the cultural obstacles and activate the forces that motivate people to change and develop. As for my experience, circumstances have forced me to live, in my own life time, the life experience of more than 500 generations going back to pre-agricultural times; no one has lived such a life and no one will

ever live it, because some of the times I lived had come and gone and will never come back again.

This paper intends to show that cultures changed in the past, continue to change today, and will change in the future. Based on this, the paper articulates a theory of sociocultural transformation as a part of a developmental theory that sees development as a comprehensive societal process with two parts; economic restructuring and sociocultural transformation. Societal development is like a bird; it needs two healthy wings to fly, economic restructuring and sociocultural transformation; with only one wing, the bird is able to hop and jump, but it cannot fly no matter how hard it may try.

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