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& Essays

Comparative & Historical Sociology

The newsletter of the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section
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Editorial Preface

This issue features [Ann Swidler](#)'s paper on Cultural Repertoires which evoked the discussion in the [last issue](#) [Note by the webmanager: because of a mistake in the newsletter, the final version of Ann Swidler's paper was not published online until May 21.] We are also continuing the discussion of Charles Ragin's conceptualization of fuzzy-set social science with a critique by [James Hollander](#). Next, [Brian Gran](#) summarizes the CHS roundtable at the ASA in 2001. We are also presenting a contribution by [Behrooz Tamdgidi](#) about what he calls the 'sociology of self-knowledge.' Additional contributions are by [Levon Chorbajian](#) and [Hans Bakker](#). In the next issue, we will be featuring a critique by Stephen Turner of an article by Robert Marsh in the AJS (106). We would welcome other contributions reflecting on Marsh's comments concerning Weber's sociology of law. Contact hbakker@uoguelph.ca. We would like to acknowledge the technical assistance provided by Emily Wilson & Janice Vincent towards the production of this issue.

--JIB

"Diversity exists not only in the different configurations of set memberships that social phenomena exhibit but also in the degree to which they belong to such sets and configurations."

Ragin, Charles. 2000. *Fuzzy-Set Social Science*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 149.

Modernism and Post-Modernism in Light of SR and RS: Some Neglected Scholarly Contributions to Chinese, Japanese and Indian Religious Perspectives

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This newsletter is devoted to Comparative-Historical Sociology (CHS) as a sub-disciplinary "section" of sociology, primarily American sociology. Contributors have attempted to clarify theoretical and methodological issues, as well as promoting different foci of study. Should we study "collective behavior" using positivistic-naturalistic methods? Should we examine "cultural repertoires" using more interpretive approaches? Are "revolutions" best studied from a Critical-Marxist perspective? Is "gender" as an object of CHS study best comprehended through a Feminist paradigm? Etc. In general, "What should be our 'objects' of study?" and "How should we study them?" Swidler, for example, argues in favor of concentrating on "meaning-making processes," especially "collective identity formation in social movements" as an object of study. She favors a method that emphasizes "institutionalized practice" rather than "action."

One interesting example of "the construction of meaning" in terms of "collective identity in a politicized context" is "religious belief systems." Religious dogmas are an important object of study in classical sociological theory. In "pre-modern" (pre-Enlightenment) European societies the institutionalized religions had a major impact on "cultural repertoires."

One key methodological problem is whether to study religious "dogmas" from a CHS perspective or a more "humanistic" interdisciplinary perspective. There is a clear administrative distinction made in university curricula and departments between "the sociology of religion" (SR) and "religious studies" (RS). Frequently those sociologists of religion (SR) who study religious phenomena comparatively and historically do not pay sufficient attention to comparative and historical aspects of the interdisciplinary field of religious studies (RS). Yet, when the CHS of religion (in SR) and religious studies (RS) -- as a comparative and historical interdisciplinary pursuit -- join together, the synergy can be powerful. Brief mention of a few relatively less well known publications is warranted. (These are books and chapters which are well known to specialists in SR or RS, but not well known to CHS generally.)

Andre Padoux (1963, 1975, 1990) deserves to be better known, for example, outside of the very specialized part of RS which concentrates on classical Indian tantra. His meticulous scholarship on Hindu Tantrism provides perspective on the notion of "cultural repertoires" that deserves attention from sociologists who have no particular interest in the sociology of religion (SR) but are concerned with CHS generally.

Similarly, Reinhard May's careful textual analysis of Heidegger's Being and Time in light of the largely unacknowledged East Asian sources of some of his more provocative ideas about Nothingness and Death deserves to be better known to those interested in theories and methodologies of CHS. Earlier work on the "genesis" of Heidegger's magnum opus by Kisiel is further rounded out when we place Heidegger into a broader CHS

framework. Graham Parkes' essay on Heidegger's Japanese influences just prior to WWII is a beautiful example of the institutional context of cultural repertoires. Such scholars as Kuki Shuzo, Yamanouchi Tokuryu, Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi and Nishida Kitaro may have been as important a source of what are now often considered "post-modernist" ideas as Heidegger's more explicitly recognized roots in Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers.

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Padoux, Andre. 1990 [1975, 1963]. *Vac: The Concept of the World in Selected Hindu Tantras*. Tr. of Padoux 1963 by Jacques Gontier. Albany, N. Y.: SUNY Press.

Parkes, Graham. 1996. "Rising Sun over Black Forest: Heidegger's Japanese Connections." Pp. 79-117 in May, Reinhard 1996.

