

ERICH FROMM and MICHAEL MACCOBY. *Social character in a Mexican village; a sociopsychanalytic study*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970. 303 p. US \$8.95 (cloth), US \$4.95 (paper).

The appearance of *Social character in a Mexican village* marks the beginning of a new trend in the study of the Mexican national character. According to Fromm and Maccoby the purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to test a methodology whereby psychoanalytic theory could be applied to the study of social groups without psychoanalyzing the individual members of the groups, (b) to test Fromm's theory of social character, and (c) to obtain information which could be useful in the planning of social change in peasant societies. These are ambitious and worthy goals for any study, but in the hands of Fromm, commonplace.

Before launching into an analysis of the material which Fromm and Maccoby have presented, the reader should be aware that the theme of Mexican characterology can be traced back to the study by the Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos, *Profile of man and culture in Mexico*, which appeared in 1934. This work was followed twenty years later by the seminal series, "México y lo Mexicano," completed under the direction of Leopoldo Zea. The approach to the Mexican character adopted by Ramos and most Mexican intellectuals has been purely speculative and stresses the philosophical and literary side of the Mexican. Taken together, these works are necessary reading by which to gauge the success of later work on Mexican characterology.

In recent years, studies of characterology have become more empirically based, and there have been large scale attempts to reconstruct the national character of people by means of surveys and questionnaires. The most recent of these attempts has been the study by Fromm and Maccoby.

Fromm in 1957, and later joined by Maccoby in 1960, set out to develop a methodology by which information could be obtained from Mexican peasants from which psychoanalytic interpretations could be derived. The method settled upon was the interpretative questionnaire and is similar to that used by Adorno and associates in *The authoritarian personality*. The guiding assumption was that such a methodology would reveal the nuclear character of each villager, from which the social character of the Mexican peasant could be described.

The village selected by Fromm was in the State of Morelos and consisted of about 800 inhabitants. The interpretative questionnaire, along with the Rorschach and the Thematic Apperception Test, was scored for 406 adult villagers (200 men and 206 women). The core of the book applies the data to Fromm's characterology described in *Escape from freedom* (1941) and *Man for himself* (1947).

The characterological distinctions for which the interpretative questionnaire was scored were: mode of assimilation, productiveness, mode of relatedness, sociopolitical relatedness, and parental fixation. Correlational and factor analyses, as the authors point out, shows that free landowners of the village were productive-hoarding, landless day laborers were unproductive-receptive, and the new type of Mexican peasant entrepreneur is markedly productive-exploitative.

The factors which have contributed to the unproductive-receptive character of the Mexican male are founded on the historical forces which have played upon the Mexican peasant society. These forces revolve around the feudal system which had been established even prior to the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spaniards. In such a hierarchical system, the peasant was dependent upon the master of



*patrón*, who doled out favors as well as penalties for even the slightest of transgressions. In such a situation, the male was powerless, and his receptive orientation was reinforced by the superior *patrón*. Accordingly, the authors argue that even today the vestiges of this social system are manifest in the social character of the majority of Mexican males studied. Later, in a discussion of possibilities for social change, Fromm and Maccoby conclude that before a new type of man can emerge in Mexican peasant society the sociopsychological consequences of these historical antecedents in his character must be broken. Where this break has occurred, the productive-exploitative modern entrepreneur can be found.

Although the authors claim that the study provides a favorable test of Fromm's theory, it should be pointed out that, despite the sophisticated data analysis, this study cannot be taken as a test of the theory. The study is only an application of the theory to a single peasant village. More importantly, the methodology employed by Fromm and Maccoby suffers from a lack of objectivity. Specifically, the social character of the Mexican peasant is derived from the interpretative questionnaire and other projective devices and scored in large measure by the clinical inference of the authors. The reader, although provided with the questionnaire in the appendix, is given little information as to its scoring. In short, in the absence of a scoring manual, replication would be difficult.

Over-all, the study is a disappointment in achieving the purposes of the authors. True, the goals were ambitious, but from Fromm the reviewers expected more than what was delivered. In addition to the shortcomings of the methodology, other criticisms can be levied at the authors for their disregard of the social forces which have played upon the character of the Mexican villager. Although the authors refer, on numerous occasions, to the importance of exterior social forces upon social character, they often neglect such factors themselves. The reader is given the impression that the village is an isolated unit and not a part of the social mainstream of contemporary Mexico. The obvious effects of modernization, mass media (e.g., TV), tourism, and a continued nationalistic spirit are often ignored in the analysis of social character. Moreover, the study would have profited if added attention had been given to Mexican history in the formation of national character.

Although this study of Mexican social character has opened the door to more refined and theory-based approaches to the study of national characterology, it is hoped that greater attention be given to the people being studied than to methodological considerations. It is also hoped that, in any future study of Mexican character, María Elvira Bermúdez' *La vida familiar del mexicano*, José E. Iturriaga's *La estructura social y cultural de México*, and Rogelio Díaz Guerrero's *Estudios sobre la psicología del mexicano* will be consulted for possible insights into Mexican characterology.

Before concluding, it should be emphasized that, despite its shortcomings, this book has much to offer the student of Mexico. Chapter 9, on the formation of character in childhood, is particularly good, as are Chapters 7, 8, and 10 concerning relationships between men and women, alcoholism, and possibilities for social change. Finally, Fromm and Maccoby have provided a valuable model for the study of social character, which can be applied to the study of other social classes and nationalities.

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