NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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NATIONAL CHARACTER:

AN OLD PROBLEM RE-EXAMINED

Human groups, such as families, tribes, and nations, are often perceived as possessing mental qualities and characteristics more or less common to the group as a whole. This ancient tendency to attribute properties of personality or individuality to human aggregates is particularly strong nowadays with regard to nations, the basic units of political action in this age of nationalism and internationalism.

In the recent UNESCO study by W. Buchanan and H. Cantril, *How Nations See Each Other* (1953), based on an eight-nation sample, few findings are more revealing than the low frequency of respondents who declare themselves unable to characterize their own nation. All but a very small proportion gave their views freely when asked to describe the character of their countrymen. When this same question was asked with regard to a series of other nationalities, the "Don't know" responses ("impossible to characterize") were in some cases much more frequent—up to 71 per cent as in the case of the German sample in regard to the Chinese; in others again very low—down to 3 per cent as in the western European responses regarding the United States. These variations are assumed to reflect dif-

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ferences in the degree of familiarity of nations with each other, depending on their mutual relationships over time, their physical proximity or distance, and so on.

The Buchanan-Cantril study, being "a study in public opinion" only, is, however, not concerned with the question whether or not, or how far, the views held by members of various nations are *correct* in the sense of representing the various national characters objectively. It hardly even discusses whether or not there exists such a thing in non-subjective reality. Admittedly, the method used in the study (choice of twelve predetermined adjectives like "hard-working," "brave," "cruel," "backward," etc.) has its limitations even in gauging opinion. It is neither intended for character analysis nor would it have been adequate.

The study is, however, concerned with something else, namely, the significance of the views and opinions recorded for the problem of international understanding. How far do they—whether in themselves "true" or "false"—indicate friendship, sympathy, and respect, how far tensions and hostility, between the nations in question? To measure this, the authors compute "friendliness scores" for the nations surveyed by weighing the frequencies of positive (friendly) adjective choices against those of negative (unfriendly) choices. As one would expect, it turns out that there is more friendliness between some nations than between others. It also turns out that the nations surveyed show the highest "friendliness score" in relation to themselves: in all but one case each of them estimated its own worth higher, in some cases much higher, than that of the other peoples. From this it would appear that nations tend to be Narcissi when viewing themselves. How far this is true as a general rule was, however, again clearly outside the scope of the study here under discussion. In everyday conversation one sometimes hears references to peoples who in their relations to others are believed to be moved by "inferiority feelings," "self-hatred," etc. Obviously, the psychodynamics of nationalism need to be studied by more extensive opinion surveys, perhaps on the model of the pilot studies by Cantril and his associates, but supplemented by research in depth by other methods.

The topic of the present essay is not the problem of international friendliness, or the psychology of nationalism as such, but rather the problem whether in fact there exist mental characteristics which are common to all or most individuals in a national population in such a fashion that one is justified in using terms like "national character" or the "personality" of a people. In this particular context it is immaterial whether that character or

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any single characteristic that may be part of a people's mental makeup is good, bad, or indifferent from the point of view of international understanding. All that matters is the reality of human nature itself, as manifested in the mental structures of nations, be they mutually similar or dissimilar, friendly or hostile.

The popular assumption is, as I stated at the outset, that there is in fact such a thing as national character, and most individuals when asked express rather definite ideas about the character of the people they belong to as well as other nations with whom they are more or less familiar. These ideas are indeed definite, to the extent of having become fixed stereotypes, like "the proud Spaniard," "the polite Frenchman," "the optimistic American," and "the practical Englishman." There is a vast variety of these ready-made generalizations and images in the folklore or—perhaps better —the collective consciousness of most nations. What are we to make of them from a scientific point of view? How far are they valid? How far are they mere myths, expressing popular illusions or self-delusions about the human nature of nations?

On the basis of the attempts hitherto made to explore the problem of national character scientifically, students seem to agree that, while popular images contain much that cannot be confirmed, there is in many of them a kernel of truth, a core of valid concepts that have been developed from common-sense knowledge acquired through a people's historical experience with itself and others. The process of forming common-sense ideas of this kind can be traced back as far as recorded history goes. It may indeed be part of the universal drama in which peoples face each other in their fated roles as neighbors or strangers, as friends or enemies, as conquerors or vanquished. We must assume that ideas like these are originally conceived by individuals and then through social communication, spoken and written, deposited within the collectivity and circulated as common currency. Where, for instance, do we find character portraits of nations more lucid and penetrating than that by Tacitus of ancient Germany; or that by Snorre, the saga historian, of the old Norse peoples; or those of the great nineteenth-century Russian novelists, foremost Dostoevski, of their own people? And where in our own day do we find more strikingly brilliant national character studies than those by writers like André Siegfried, S. de Madariaga, or Harold Nicolson? Yet, while paying homage to the masters, we will not forget that anonymous forces and unknown individuals are also at work forming the current images of nations. It is indeed a question whether the masters do not to a large extent draw upon the nameless sources for their insights.

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Apart, however, from the level of expression, what is it that prompts men to make generalizations of this sort? We may assume that idle curiosity is at play in some cases. More often the driving force is probably of a political nature in the widest sense of the term. Nations are facing each other on the world arena in competition, in conflict, or in relations of peaceful exchange. The desire to know one's self and one's own capabilities as a people and to predict the attitudes, habits, and behavior patterns of other powers is an important motive in the minds of leaders and policy-makers, especially in times of crises. By way of illustration I shall quote a few examples of this type of political imagery.

Rightly or wrongly, the Soviet rulers are believed to be "keen judges of human psychology" (G. Kennan), particularly as it applies to their own people. That they are at least very much concerned with this problem has been admirably documented by Nathan Leites in his book *A Study of Bolshevism* (1953). From this I borrow the following two quotations from Lenin, which may serve to illustrate the point.

We are not creating "human material" for ourselves, but are taking, and cannot refuse, *what is given to us*. Without this we cannot live [1902].

Our general weakness may be connected with the Slavic character, with the fact that we are insufficiently persistent, that we persevere insufficiently to the end in the pursuit of a given aim [1919].

My second example comes from Max Weber, the great sociologist and political scientist of the German language. Students of his have found that in his scientific writings he rejected such conceptions as "national character" or "folk spirit," which figured so prominently in the German scholarly literature of his time. Yet in the dark days of November, 1918, when after the military defeat, which he had calmly foreseen as inevitable, a violent social revolution threatened to make total chaos of Germany, he wrote this sentence (in a letter to his mother): "Anyhow, the nation as such is nevertheless a people of discipline [*ein Disziplinvolk*]." Ultimately, his faith in the future of his country found support in a generalized idea of the people's character.

From Churchill's speech during the secret Parliament session on December 10, 1942, comes another example. In order to explain the complicated situation of the French in regard to the Allied campaign in North Africa, he proposed to examine certain aspects of French mentality:

I am not at all defending or still less eulogizing this French mentality. But it would be very foolish not to try to understand what is passing in other people's minds and what are the secret springs of action to which they respond. The Al-

mighty in His infinite wisdom did not see fit to create Frenchmen in the image of Englishmen.

Finally, it may be appropriate to cite an instance of quite recent date. The following is a remark in a press report by an American correspondent in London on the emerging British policy toward a united Europe: "The British are a pragmatic people. As such, they will move slowly, accepting those aspects of European political and economic unification that they believe will work" (*New York Times*, April 21, 1957).

Examples of this type of statement could be multiplied ad infinitum. And if one were to attempt an analysis of national character interpretations as they occur on all levels in speech and writing of nations like France, England, Germany, Russia, or even a relative newcomer to history like the United States, one would have on his hands a formidable task in each case. The material on France alone would, if collected, probably fill a medium-sized library.

In addition to this wealth of statements on national characters and characteristics to be found in the writings of novelists, historians, biographers, and scholarly men of affairs of all literate countries throughout the ages, there exists a small body of systematic statements of very recent origin. These have been developed notably in the United States and Britain during the last fifteen years or so and are based on hypotheses of modern social science. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss these recent studies, mainly with regard to their theoretical and methodological foundations.

The studies in question originally grew out of the policy and intelligence needs of the Western allies during World War II. Their objective was to achieve a fuller understanding of the Allied nations in order to improve inter-Allied working relations and of enemy nations in order to strengthen the political and psychological capabilities of the West in the total war in which it was engaged. As examples of the first category one may cite Margaret Mead's book published in America under the title *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, in England as *The American Character* (1942), as well as her study, "The American Troops and the British Community" (1944). Of the second category, there is a long series of books and papers; it may suffice here to mention the studies on the Germans by Henry V. Dicks, Kurt Lewin, Erik H. Erikson, Richard Brickner, and Robert H. Lowie, and later studies by David Rodnick, Bertram Schaffner, and others; on the Japanese those by Ruth Benedict, Geoffrey Gorer, and Douglas Haring. The cold war, 1948 and afterward, gave rise to an intensified interest in the

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mentality of the Russians, and a number of national character studies from this recent period deal with the people of Russia. (For a special analysis and a bibliography of this group of studies see my article, "Der russische Volkscharakter," *Kölner Zeitschr. f. Soziologie u. Sozialpsychologie* [1956].) The last decade also saw the publication of studies on Western nations, such as G. Gorer's *The American People* (1948) and *Exploring English Character* (1955) and D. Rodnick's *The Norwegians* (1955). On the whole, however, the productive impetus which started this trend of research seems to have all but spent itself by now; the scholars most actively connected with it have turned to other subjects. Some of the reasons why, temporarily at least, this chapter may be drawing to its close should become clearer as we survey its underpinnings in general theory and method.

The studies here referred to did not originate in any of the schools of psychology or sociology but rather in a school of cultural anthropology influenced by neo-Freudian depth psychology. The general postulates upon which they are based have aptly been termed "psychocultural" hypotheses, since their decisive point is the interdependence of two major variables: "psyche," currently called rather "personality," and "culture." The interaction of these twin forces is sometimes expressed in terms of near-identity, as "personality-in-culture" or "culture-in-personality." The two are seen principally as members of each other rather than as separate and independent entities. Their definition can roughly be summarized in the following general propositions:

1. The culture of a human group is defined as a more or less complex configuration of behavior patterns. These are not merely an accumulation of different and separate traits but form a structure, a Gestalt, with a "strain toward consistency" (F. Kluckhohn), and show a relative constancy or at least a resistance against change.

2. A personality is defined as the totality of mental characteristics in a human individual. Within it, two major structural components are integrated into a functioning organization (person): the idiosyncratic personality and the "basic personality" (A. Kardiner). While the former is unique in each individual case, the latter includes characteristics which are typical or common within the social group. Depending on the size of the social universe in question, these traits are therefore shared by a larger or smaller number of individuals.

3. It is in the basic personality that we must look for national characteristics, these being mental traits shared by individuals of the same nationality.

4. Basic personality characteristics (behavior patterns: dispositions, conceptions, modes of relating to others, etc.) are acquired through a process of learning during the life-career of each individual person. National characteristics typically are learned cultural behavior in the sense of being formed as the socially required personality traits, in accordance with the prevailing patterns of the culture, its ethos and institutions.

5. A most important phase of this learning process is believed to be that connected with the individual's initial socialization in early infancy. The habits established at this stage by the treatment of the child through its parents and elders—differential reward and punishment, etc.—is believed to influence all subsequent learning and hence to be of predominant importance in forming the personality. The linkage between culture and personality is therefore largely (though not fully) explained in terms of the cultural regularities of child training and childhood experience in a given society. This crucial part of the psychocultural hypothesis may best be summarized in the words of R. Linton:

The concept of basic personality types . . . [involves] several different elements. It rests upon the following postulates:

1. That the individual's early experiences exert a lasting effect upon his personality, especially upon the development of his projective systems.

2. That similar experiences will tend to produce similar personality configurations in the individuals who are subjected to them.

3. That the techniques which the members of any society employ in the care and rearing of children are culturally patterned and will tend to be similar, although never identical, for various families within the society.

4. That the culturally patterned techniques for the care and rearing of children differ from one society to another.

If these postulates are correct, and they seem to be supported by a wealth of evidence, it follows:

1. That the members of any given society will have many elements of early experience in common.

2. That as a result of this they will have many elements of personality in common.

3. That since the early experience of individuals differs from one society to another, the personality norms for various societies will also differ [R. Linton, Preface to A. Kardiner, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society* (1945)].

When social scientists apply hypotheses such as these to the study of the national character or the typical behavior patterns of a certain people, they refer to broad tendencies and regularities in the mental makeup and life-

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style of the culture and people in question. In so doing, they are not suggesting that a certain single characteristic, or any number of these, could not be present at all in another culture. On the contrary, taken singly, every characteristic is universal in the sense in which it is true that "human nature is always the same." What is unique in a national character, therefore, lies not in its components taken singly as such but rather in the composition as a whole, the "ensemble of its regularities" (N. Leites). While the elements remain the same, the total character configurations may vary enormously, depending on the combination, emphasis, suppression, and interaction of those elements. In exploring, for instance, Russian character and behavior according to this general theory, one would not look for nationally typical single characteristics so much as for the typically Russian way of organizing such basic and universal human traits as "the needs for food, love, sex, mastery over objects, etc." (H. V. Dicks), into the total cultural personality which is characteristically Russian. It is assumed, then, that this syndrome will be found to exist, more or less, in the personality makeup of most normal individuals in the population. This assumption does not imply that there are no individual personality differences. Quite the contrary. It is only hypothesized that there are, by and large, in most individual personalities throughout the population or cultural area certain "broad tendencies and regularities" which are more or less common to all and are, as it were, "built into" each individual however much he or she may, as an ideosyncratic and in this sense unique personality, differ from everybody else.

The dual emphasis of these general propositions on (1) culturally or socially learned behavior patterns and (2) early events in the individual's life as the decisive elements in a scientific theory of national character has certain methodological implications to which we shall now turn our attention.

We find in the first place that the studies here under review fall into two broad categories in regard to the type of data to which they refer. Thus there is, on the one hand, a group of studies based primarily on human data; on the other, a group based on cultural data. The distinction, however, is obviously only a matter of research methodology, since both groups are predicated on the general theory of personality and culture. In both groups we find a variety of specific techniques of data-gathering and of analysis. I shall mention the most important.

Prominent among the techniques used in the first category of studies (based on human data) are (1) direct or indirect field observation, e.g., in

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order to obtain primary data on child-rearing in a given society for an interpretation of typical adult personality characteristics as related to these data; (2) direct clinical analysis of adult individuals, e.g., with a view to establishing psychocultural factors and events in their early life that may have affected the development of their present personalities; and (3) mass observation of large samples by interview and questionnaire methods in order to obtain attitude data in statistically significant numbers from which to discover typical characteristics known or unconsciously revealed by respondents.

The specific research techniques employed in the second group vary according to the kind of cultural objects selected for investigation. The choices here are many. Technically speaking, the task is always to interpret symbolic materials (verbal and non-verbal) in terms of their projective meanings, that is, in this case as expressions of psychocultural characteristics. (The intrinsic meanings, which are the main concern of the student of cultural products as such, are of secondary importance in this context.) Materials believed to be capable of this type of interpretation are "collective documents" (Inkeles and Levinson) with a wide circulation in a society, such as folk tales, religious works, popular books and magazines, and such widely distributed pictorial material as films. Similarly, a national idiom, the spoken and written language itself, may yield insights into psychological characteristics of a people.

In order to illustrate the main types of the procedures to which I have just referred, I shall cite a few examples from the literature on this subject.

In his paper, "Some Aspects of Navaho Infancy and Early Childhood" (1947), C. Kluckhohn employs the anthropologist's method of field observation, recording in hour-by-hour detail events occurring in the daily life of a Navaho Indian community, especially the overt behavior and treatment of children, and combining this method with psychoanalytic hypotheses of personality formation and the impact of childhood experiences. (I shall return to this particular study on a later page.) Margaret Mead in her imaginative study of the American character builds her analysis in large part on observations of child-parent and especially mother-child relations in the typical United States family. She makes the point that certain basic characteristics of adult American personality, such as success orientation, competitiveness, "boasting," etc., are psychoculturally rooted in the conditional nature of parental love peculiar to that society. American children feel, according to Mead, "anxiety as to whether they will be successful in keeping their parents' love," since this will be given to them

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only on the condition that they deserve it by fulfilling certain performance standards and achieving the goals set for them. This hypothesis was partly elaborated by C. and F. Kluckhohn in their paper, "American Culture: Generalized Orientations and Class Patterns" (1946), especially with regard to the American orientation on "effort and optimism." The psychocultural source of American "optimism" is believed to be the fact that the goals and standards which are set up before the child as conditions of parental love are normally well within the child's capacity and have a good chance of being fulfilled with some, but not too much, effort.

Further applications of the anthropological field observation method, although at a distance, through informants, may be seen in two studies by an English scholar, Geoffrey Gorer: "Themes in Japanese Character," an essay (1943), and *The People of Great Russia*, a book (with John Rickman [1949]). Among the features in childhood experience which Gorer examines in both of these cultures are various restrictions of body movements imposed by social custom. In the case of the Japanese these consist in the fact that the baby is carried "spread-eagled" on the back of his mother or older siblings during the first two years of his life; that the child is carefully taught how to sit correctly and keep quiet in uncomfortable positions; and that, because the Japanese house is "dangerous for a baby" (built of fragile material and heated with open charcoal burners), the child "has to 'learn' its home completely, until, even when burdened, there is no risk of stepping where he should not." Gorer suggests that there may be some causal connection between these early forms of body discipline and certain general orientations of adult Japanese character, such as "the often noted impassivity (inscrutability)" and the "anxiety about the etiquette of sitting and bowing."

In the case of the Russians, Gorer speculates about the characterological impact of swaddling babies during the first nine months of their lives. He suggests that this severe restriction of body mobility may contribute to the development of typically Russian patterns of aggression, frustration, and hostility and that the alternating experiences of total restraint and of freedom of movement (when the baby is unswaddled for feeding and bathing) may have some causal relation to the ambivalence syndrome noted by many observers of adult Russian behavior. Gorer describes it as follows:

They tend to oscillate suddenly and unpredictably from one attitude to its contrary, especially from violence to gentleness, from excessive activity to passivity, from orgiastic indulgence to ascetic abstemiousness. . . . They also tend to oscillate between unconscious fears of isolation and loneliness, and an absence of feelings of

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individuality so that the self is, as it were, merged with its peers in a "soul-collective."

Clinical analysis of adult individuals has been used only in rare cases until now, a fact which is to be regretted, since this method, while the most expensive, is probably also the most productive. The work of Henry V. Dicks, a British psychiatrist, on German and Russian subjects must be mentioned under this heading. His studies were published in the papers "Some Psychological Studies of the German Character" (1950) and "Observations on Contemporary Russian Behaviour" (1952). In the case of the German study, the subjects were recently captured prisoners of war interned in Britain (1942); in the case of the Russian study, Soviet Russian defectors recently arrived in western Europe (1951–52). In both, the technique of investigation was that of intensive, prolonged, and repeated personal interviews. A point of special and at the time practical interest in regard to the Germans was the psychological exploration of the Nazi mentality and its relationship to German character in general. On this point, Dicks finds that "the Nazi is not a separate species of human being, but harbours in concentrated form some of the most distorted characteristics of the basic 'political' personality of Germany." This distortion of the normal personality type he describes as "a character disorder distinguished by psychological immaturity which Fromm had called the sado-masochistic or authoritarian character." Far from maintaining that the Germans are the only nation capable of fostering the Nazi mentality ("the sabre-rattling, arrogant, politically obscurantic, bigoted and xenophobic personality exists among us all"), he still believes the German character to be especially vulnerable to this type of distortion and disorder. This is due to basic personality traits, generated in normal German parent-child relations; the submissiveness under the dominating father-figure, which Dicks thinks "explains much of the love of hierarchy, of knowing one's place, of insistence on rank and title, that was so characteristic of German social institutions"; further the consequent "repression of the tender tie with the devoted, despised but idealized mother" from which comes "much of that sentimental longing for a lost happiness and promised land . . . the emotional difficulties of adolescence, the introspective, tormented self-dissection, the devaluation of women too."

In his Russian study Dicks again applies the concepts and imaginative insights of psychoanalysis. Like Gorer and others, he stresses the ambivalence in Russian character, also in regard to authority, the oscillations

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between submissiveness, even servility, and "an anarchic demand for abolition of all bounds and limitations," a trait quite different from German authoritarianism. (Dicks, incidentally, omits reference to Gorer's swaddling theory, although he otherwise quotes this author frequently and approvingly.) The characteristic form which aggression takes in Russian personality is another topic in Dicks's analysis. Especially important, also from the point of view of national character theory in general, is the distinction he makes between two different basic character structures in Russia: the original character of the peasantry and the secondary character of the elites. He is concerned with the interrelations of these two elements which together and in their polarization make up the Russian character as a whole. He describes the first according to the psychological formula "oral-ambivalent," the second as "anal-compulsive," and interprets contemporary Russian behavior in terms of a tension and interaction between these antithetical basic orientations. His interpretation, which I have discussed in detail elsewhere, is at least highly suggestive, especially with regard to the problem of the Russian people's attitude toward political authority and the present Soviet rulers. He again avoids any rash overgeneralization of the type often found in Western political journalism— that Russia will always adhere to some form of socialism, since, as one writer recently said, "the subordination of the individual to society is in the Russians' blood." (Others refer, with exactly the same effect, to "race" in this connection.) Dicks of course notes the authoritarian strain in Russian character, but he also stresses its limitations: the angry protest against being bullied by bosses and bureaucrats, the silent withdrawal into the intimate sphere, the need for privacy, for being left alone, even the need for alcohol. Normal Russians, he seems to imply, no more "have to be" forever subject to Communist domination than normal Germans "had to be" Nazis.

The method of mass observation was recently applied in a study of English character by Geoffrey Gorer (1955). This is an analysis of five thousand questionnaires which had been filled in and returned by people all over the country. The long and elaborate questionnaire was so constructed as to probe into characterologically strategic areas, such as home and family life; relations to friends and neighbors; the problems of adolescence and of growing up; ideas and facts concerning love and sex; marital attitudes and relations; the treatment and training of children; ideas on law and order; and religious beliefs and practices.

Gorer approached his data with certain working assumptions, the cru-

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cial one being that "the central problem for the understanding of the English character is the problem of aggression." To him, "the control of aggression, when carried to such remarkable lengths . . . calls for an explanation." Another assumption, related to this, was that "English people are shy and afraid of strangers, and consequently very lonely." The problem of control of aggression he links with the psychological function and the public image of the police, venturing the hypothesis that the Englishman's superego is the policeman.

Based on these assumptions, the study, in the words of an English reviewer,

yielded Mr. Gorer few surprises. . . . The police were even more popular than he expected; loneliness was even more widespread; above all, concern with aggression and its control stood out triumphantly. The high value set on marriage, the low value set on sex (except negatively, as a source of trouble), the extreme haziness or absence of religious belief among over half of the respondents, coupled with superstition concerning mascots, lucky numbers, horoscopes; the accent on "fairness"; all these were much as expected. From this material and from that concerned with daily life, recreation and social contacts, there emerges a fairly uniform and decidedly dreary picture of a society in which most people's vital forces are so concentrated on restraining their aggressive urges that little is left for anything else—except in wartime, when aggression, legitimately canalised, can produce an outburst of energy astonishing to friend and foe alike [*Economist*, August 13, 1955].

Brief mention should be made, finally, of at least a few representative studies involving various methods of analyzing cultural objects and documents. German and Russian character have, for instance, been examined on the basis of fictional films produced and widely acclaimed in those countries: G. Bateson's "Cultural and Thematic Analysis of Fictional Films" (1942); S. Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947); and E. H. Erikson's *The Legend of Maxim Gorky's Youth* (1950). Other materials used in German character studies are the book *Mein Kampf* (E. H. Erikson's "Hitler's Imagery and German Youth" [1942]); German dramatic plays (D. V. McGranahan and J. Wayne's "German and American Traits Reflected in Popular Drama" [1948]); and the German language as such (J. Thorner's "German Words, German Personality, and Protestantism" [1945]). As an example of refined technique of content analysis applied to the study of American national character should be mentioned M. Wolfenstein and N. Leites' book *Movies* (1950). While mainly referring to American data, it also offers valuable comparative observations on French and British character as reflected in this medium.

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A complete critical evaluation of the modern school of national character studies would require a far more detailed examination of their substantive aspects than is possible within the space of an essay. All I can offer here, therefore, are some evaluative comments with reference to certain aspects of theory and methodology discussed on these pages.

The school always was a subject of controversy among social scientists. It has its supporters, who appreciate its useful contributions, while admitting that not all is up to the best standards, and who believe in its future potentialities. It also has its antagonists, rejecting the approach in general and heaping ridicule on specific features, such as Gorer's "swaddling hypothesis," etc. I do not intend to enter the controversy here but shall rather try to weigh against each other what appear to me to be the points of strength and the points of weakness in the school's theoretical and methodological approach.

First the points of weakness. There are many unresolved difficulties. The school originated, as we recall, among anthropologists, the late Ruth Benedict being one of its pioneers. Now it is true that anthropologists are students of cultures, but their specific skills apply to non-literate societies of small size and relatively simple organization. What happens when this technique, which may serve admirably in the case of primitive patterns of culture, is applied to the character structure of a large, complex society like Russia, Germany, or the United States? Benedict herself initially expressed doubts about establishing patterns for more complex cultures, yet she later encouraged this trend of research and undertook a major study of modern Japan, published under the title *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946).

The fundamental difficulty in coping with highly differentiated cultures has not been overcome in any of the national character studies to date. A few attempts have been made to advance from oversimplified schemata to constructs involving a somewhat greater number of variables; thus H. V. Dicks in his study of the Russians operates with two interrelated basic character structures rather than one. Even this may be far from adequate, and many societies may require a detailed analysis of numerous subgroups (social classes, ethnic groups, etc.) and subcultures (professions, religions, etc.) to explore the variety of basic personalities which make up the total character structure of a nation. This type of multivariate analysis, however, represents a task of staggering dimensions, for which the social sciences at this time still lack many of the essential requisites. It may take decades of large-scale, patient research, especially, I believe, in the field of

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comparative sociology, to secure the foundations for studies of such complexity.

Another as yet unresolved difficulty lies in the psychological aspects of current theory and method. There is, we recall, a decisive emphasis on the processes of socialization and learning in the formative period of the individual's life-career, especially infancy and early childhood. Experimental and clinical psychologists, like the group working at the Harvard Laboratory of Human Development, who at present specialize in the study of these processes, maintain against the national character school that knowledge available at this time is not yet far enough advanced to permit conclusions and generalizations concerning the impact of child-training or childhood experiences on psychological characteristics and behavior patterns of the average adult person in a society (cf. J. W. M. Whiting and I. L. Child, *Child Training and Personality* [1953]). Again it would seem that the school is, colloquially speaking, "running ahead" of the systematic, rigorously controlled research in current social science.

A further serious difficulty in the same area of theory has to do with the relationship of childhood personality to adult personality. If it is true, as the saying goes, that "the child is the father of the man," it is also true that the man often turns out to be a person quite different from his father. How are we, then, to understand his character in the light of what he was as a child? C. Kluckhohn in his study of the Navaho Indians was struck by a strange contradiction between the exceptionally happy and harmonious childhood and adolescent personalities and the sharply deviant adult pattern of suspicion and anxiety. This made him wonder whether there is not a tendency at present to overemphasize the early years, since decisive events, also in characterological terms, may occur later in life. However, very few, if any, of the national character studies I have examined take this problem seriously into account.

Another difficulty disturbs especially sociologists and scholars in social and intellectual history rather than psychologists. It stems, like the one I mentioned first, from the legacy of anthropology with which the school started out and specifically from the postulate of relative invariance or constancy over time, applied by anthropologists to the study of their proper subjects, the cultures of non-literate societies. Possibly the gravest criticism directed against the psychocultural character studies is that of "historylessness" in dealing with complex societies, where the analysis of change over time, of social causation, and of the forces and processes of history is indispensable. The solution of this difficulty, if it is soluble, would

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seem to lie not far from where I suggested we might have to look for the solution of the difficulty of handling highly differentiated (rather than simple) social structures: in a multivariate analysis of a complexity far beyond the capabilities of present theory and method. It would indeed seem that whatever further developments in social science are required for the adequate analysis of highly differentiated structures would also have to precede any successful analysis of history as sociocultural change occurring over time within and between such structures.

Turning now to the points of strength, I hope that at least two of these should be evident from the preceding pages. That the national character studies have produced new insights and stimulated fresh thinking about an age-old problem no one could in fairness deny. More than that, perhaps, weighs another point: by virtue of the very difficulties they have revealed and the problems and research objectives they have thereby brought out, they have served the sciences well. For nothing is more essential to scientific progress than some hard intelligence of the terrain ahead and of what special equipment will be needed in order to traverse it.

A third point of strength becomes visible only by comparing this new approach with the theories and methods applied to our problem in the past. I am not referring to the purely descriptive and phenomenological material to be found in abundance in the writings of scholars and psychological novelists. I refer to theories and methods aiming at causal interpretation of the phenomena or explanation of their genesis. In this respect the new approach appears to be a first attempt at systematically reducing the problem of national character to researchable elements, thereby making it a scientific problem. This does not mean that there is any dearth of genetic theories in the literature before and outside the school I speak of. On the contrary, there are many such hypotheses, ascribing the formation of national and cultural characteristics to almost everything under the sun: race, geography (or, both together, *Blut und Boden*), climate, religion, history, economic factors, great men, technology, ideology, etc. One or more of such master forces are explicitly or by implication assumed to be *causa efficiens* in producing and forming the character of nations. However, the literature includes, as far as I can see, no serious attempt at making any one of them the basis of a systematic national character analysis. This would have required a detailed and consistent set of theoretical propositions such as that described earlier in this paper. Instead, the master hypotheses appear as vague generalities or are tacitly taken for granted in statements which must remain impressionistic speculations, whatever the level of scholarship

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otherwise. This approach certainly has its merits and can be productive especially in the hands of erudite and brilliant writers.[1] It fills a need and is gratefully received, for people do want answers to these pressing questions about themselves and others; they love mirrors. Yet the new approach marks an important forward stride in that it identifies aspects of the problem which are accessible to attack by experimental, clinical, and other rigorously scientific methods of research. These aspects are, as we saw, the events and processes of early socialization in childhood, of learning and training, as well as the phenomena observable in human relations, especially inside the intimate groups of society. To have helped bring this objective within the scientific field of vision remains perhaps the most important contribution of the national character school between 1940 and 1955.

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1. I have elsewhere discussed the ideas on Russian character presented by two eminent contemporary scholars, André Siegfried and Alfred Weber (cf. "Der russische Volkscharakter").

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