

## MODERN AND TRADITIONAL CULTURES

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### Summary

Traditional cultures are seen as the opposite of modern cultures. In fact, it is a construction which makes simple a reality which in reality is complex. Traditional cultures are supposed to function according to laws which are totally different from those of modern cultures. But since the modernizing process has integrated and transformed almost all countries and cultures, it is legitimate to ask if the opposition between modern and traditional culture has anything to do with reality. This opposition is the result and the instrument of different discourses and practices and an expression of the tension between the dynamics of globalization and local cultures trying to defend a certain specificity. Would it not be possible to define modern culture as cultural responses to the modernizing process? In this case even local cultures which are informed by the challenge of modernism would be just a specific expression of modern culture.

### 1. Introduction

The French sociologist Lévi-Strauss identifies two types of cultures as far as attitude towards time is concerned: "Hot" and "cold" cultures. "Cold" cultures are those which function like mechanical watches. In them there is a consciousness of tradition as something static, which means that there is the will to prevent any change. Things repeat themselves unceasingly. "Hot" cultures, on the contrary, function like a steam-engine, which means, according to thermodynamic principles, that these "hot" cultures consider change as normal.

Lévi-Strauss is, of course, aware of the affinity of this typology with other dichotomies,

like historical-non historical, primitive-civilized which have been developed to characterize the difference between European and non-European cultures. These dichotomies have become problematic in the consciousness of the International community, since they imply a hierarchy and a discrimination in the way things are seen. That is why Lévi-Strauss stresses that "cold" cultures are not out of history and not without history. He also stresses that there exists no childish people. All people are grown up, even if nobody has written the chronicle of their childhood. All these precautions to distance himself from the main European categories is a sign of intellectual discomfort resulting from the fact that there exists a treasure house of images which structure the way non-European cultures are seen in the western world. New attempts to describe differences between western and non western cultures appear as a way of giving old categories a new look which can be better accepted. In spite of these caveats, it is still difficult to understand how Lévi-Strauss can concede that "cold" cultures have a history but at the same time write that they try not to be affected by history.

The characteristics of "hot" and "cold" cultures are exactly those of modern and traditional cultures respectively. Here too, the identity of each type of culture comes from its differences with the other type. A traditional culture is a culture which is not modern. Differences are usually seen from the perspective of modern cultures. Traditional cultures appear thus to lack what modern cultures possess. It is assumed that you cannot understand the one without contrasting it to the other.

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