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onstrate when a valid comparison has been achieved. For example, towns are often compared because they are of similar size or similar (or contrasting) ethnic composition. These similarities are all too often only superficial, with the distinctions discerned not being the result of size differences or contrasting ethnicities, as assumed, but of their respective locations within the regional system.

Assessing the regional system before further analysis also permits broader understanding of the entire region. Simply generalizing from one or even a few towns to an entire region does not provide a rationale for why doing so might be valid. A regional perspective, by contrast, permits the selection of towns at recognized levels of the system. If the focus is on a center at each of the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, each can be more justifiably generalized for their respective levels to achieve a sounder regional picture. While this does not overcome all of the problems of generalization, it does provide a rational basis for why representative towns were selected while they are compared or contrasted with others.

Regional analysis has generated research into systematic spatial variation in a manner unmatched by other approaches. Thus, while approaches such as world systems theory have argued for spatial linkages, these connections are typically asserted rather than demonstrated, and some devotees of this approach have turned to regional analysis to provide the specific, demonstrable linkages that the former theory has not provided.

While studies in regional analysis continue to employ the traditional approaches and models, they have also branched out to include such topics as spatial bases of ethnicity, the regional patterns of religious centers and gods (Sangren 1987), the distributions of family types and inheritance practices, the spatial patterns of class development (Smith 1976), and the political nature of regional culture (Lomnitz-Adler 1992). Thus, regional analysis not only provides a demonstrable structure for compelling social analyses, it highlights inadequacies in the culture-as-thing-in-itself approach. By pointing out systematic variations in social practices, regional analysis can be seen as an essential component of cultural analyses and one that potentially contributes to a finer-grained analysis. Moreover, it is a multiplier not a competitor. Rather than a competing paradigm, it is, in fact, an approach emphasizing rigorous spatial and temporal analysis that can provide a richer analysis of the theoretical approaches to which it is wed.

ROSS HASSIG

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# REINCARNATION

Although probably all educated Westerners are familiar at least in a general way with the reincarnation beliefs of Hindus and Buddhists, much less well known are the animistic reincarnation beliefs of other peoples. If we may generalize from cross-cultural studies using the Human Relations Area Files, roughly half of the world's cultures have reincarnation beliefs (Matlock 1993; Somersan 1981). These beliefs appear on all continents and in most culture areas, although they are most prominent today in West Africa and northwestern North America.

There are important differences between animistic and Hindu/Buddhist beliefs. One of these is the absence from the former of a concept of karma, which, broadly speaking, holds that one's actions in one's present life have repercussions in one's future lives. Another difference is the place within the systems of the idea that human beings may be reborn as other animals (transmigration). Hinduism and Buddhism allow for transmigration as part of a cycle that eventually returns a human being to life as a human being, but such beliefs are much less common in animistic cultures. The majority of societies with reincarnation beliefs do not have transmigration beliefs also, and societies with transmigration beliefs do not necessarily have reincarnation beliefs. Moreover, when both appear, they are rarely part of a common cycle (Matlock 1993).

These differences have important implications for the social function of the beliefs. Under Hinduism and Buddhism, the major function is to provide a moral imperative—one misbehaves at risk of paying for one's transgression in subsequent lives. Under animism, the situation is more complex. Much emphasis is placed on returning to the same community, usually to the same clan if not the same lineage, and a child is very often named after the deceased relative of whom he or she is thought to be the reincarnation. Because names are typically clan property, this naming practice emphasizes reincarnation in the clan.

Reincarnation plays a major role in "social reproduction," the maintenance of the social order over time. A child may be expected to grow up to take on the social role (or be eligible to take on the role) of the person whose name he or she bears. This is especially true in ranked societies, where certain clans and lineages regularly supply the community chiefs.

Reincarnation is related cross-culturally not only to hereditary ranking, which is strongly clan-related, but to hereditary succession to the office of community headman, which may be clan-related but is not necessarily so. It is also related to inheritance of property in the clan (as opposed to the lineage alone) and to cross-cousin marriage. This last finding may seem coincidental, but it is consistent with the others. Cross-cousin marriage unites the same families generation after generation and ensures that property remains close to home. A person who reincarnates into the appropriate relative and namesake can expect to inherit in a future life the property and social roles held in the present life. In the majority of societies with reincarnation beliefs, reincarnation is believed to be possible for all. However, in some societies, only some categories of people are thought to reincarnate. Common categories include shamans and great hunters, those who die by violence in adulthood, and those who die as children. The last category is the most common. Often reincarnation is sex-linked, so that a male is reborn a male and a female a female, but this is not invariably the case. Sex-linked reincarnation may be related to sex-linked names, although this association has not yet been investigated cross-culturally.

The word "reincarnation" masks a variety of sub-beliefs, many of which are not readily identifiable as reincarnation using the Hindu/Buddhist model (which also has several variations, not treated here). Whereas Hinduism and Buddhism posit a one-to-one relationship between the deceased and the reincarnate, animistic cultures often do not have this expectation. In some societies, it is thought possible for one person to be reincarnated in several persons or for several persons to be reincarnated in one person. Although such beliefs are found throughout the world, they are most prominent among the Inuit, for whom the name is itself a sort of soul.

In some societies, a kind of reincarnation of living persons into descendents, generally grandchildren, is believed possible. Typically this is accomplished through the grandparent giving his or her name to the grandchild, but the spiritual linkage between namesakes that results suggests that names are not all that is involved. A similar practice involves a successor to an office taking the name of his deceased predecessor. Along with the name he takes his social role and something of his personality, again suggesting a spiritual connection akin to reincarnation.

The generalizations made above seem to hold regardless of the type of reincarnation. But because studies have included the range of reincarnation beliefs under a single variable, and have not attempted to analyze sub-beliefs separately, it is possible that there is some variation by sub-belief that has not yet been identified. At present, the only distinction that can be made is between reincarnation and transmigration.

Judging by its widespread occurrence, reincarnation is an ancient belief. Animistic reincarnation

probably preceded Hindu/Buddhist beliefs by a considerable time. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Hindu/Buddhist beliefs were derived from animistic ones.

There has been little attempt to theorize about reincarnation in animistic cultures, perhaps because the importance of the belief has not been recognized. One of the better-known attempts to account for the belief was undertaken by sociologist Guy Swanson (1960). Drawing theoretical inspiration from Émile Durkheim, who argued that religious beliefs were modeled on social structure, Swanson suggested that reincarnation beliefs were related to the number of levels of decision-making in a society. Although Swanson's hypothesis was supported in his own cross-cultural study, other studies have failed to replicate it, and it would now appear wise to abandon it (Davis 1971; Matlock 1993).

An alternative view put forward by Edward Tylor (1871) may be more plausible. He believed that reincarnation, like other beliefs about the soul, was a conclusion arrived at through observation and experience. He noted that many peoples related reincarnation to signs such as bodily marks reminiscent of a deceased person and dreams of pregnant women in which deceased relatives appeared. The issue of signs in the origin of reincarnation beliefs is important theoretically, because if reincarnation does indeed have a source outside the social order, it is possible that reincarnation provided the motivation for social practices such as naming practices and rules of inheritance and succession, rather than the reverse (Matlock 1993).

Some anthropologists (notably Antonia Mills) are willing to consider the possibility that reincarnation actually occurs. Mills takes her lead from psychical researcher Ian Stevenson (1987), the pioneer of work in this area. Stevenson and Mills weigh signs such as those mentioned above as evidence for reincarnation. They note cultural constructions in some cases but argue that others are not easily dismissed as only cultural constructions. Debate on this issue forms part of a book on Native American reincarnation beliefs edited by Mills and Richard Slobodin (1994).

JAMES G. MATLOCK

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# RELIGION

Among the several conclusions the anthropological study of religion has reached since its Victorian beginnings are that certain religious ideas are universal and seem as old as human society; that things religious pervade other cultural systems and cannot adequately be studied separate from those contexts; that religion is an extremely powerful motivator of behavior; that religious structures and, especially, sentiments, are reflective of social ones; that religion forms a strong basis for social and cultural identity, and is a common yardstick by which people compare themselves with others. Numerous functional explanations—for example, religion provides explanation, or comfort; religion sanctions social, economic, and