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A review article by

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This paper was written in 1962/3 while the author was Carnegie Visiting Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
The books by Ho and Marsh—a historian and a sociologist—deal both with the problems of mobility in classical Chinese society and both address themselves to the analysis of social processes in historical societies, focusing on what has been a central problem in sociological inquiry, namely, that of social mobility and also—in Marsh's case—structure of the bureaucracy. Marsh's book is dedicated to "The Revival of the Sociological Study of History"—a fitting description also of Po's study. As such, they may serve as a good starting point for an appraisal of some of the main problems of such study. Accordingly, we intend to use them in the following pages as a spring board for the discussion of such problems. Their usefulness for such an appraisal lies in that they first provide an analysis of an important aspect of the structure of one major historical society, and second, a very concrete focus for the discussion of some central problems of sociological studies of historical societies. In this way it avoids the dangers of vague generalizations and generalities.
Let us start with a brief survey of the context and problems of the two books. A common aim of theirs is to analyse the system of stratification of Imperial China (especially of Ming and Ching China—although it does necessarily span over into former periods) through the analysis of the determinants of bureaucratic advancement. Both Ho's and Marsh's first steps are an analysis of the general system of stratification of China. This system is defined in the usual sociological terms derived from Max Weber—i.e., as dealing with the differential distribution of wealth, prestige, and power and with the criteria of such distribution. While there is certainly nothing novel in this appraisal or in the general description of the Chinese system of stratification—which builds heavily—and justly too—on the works of Eberhard, Wittfogel, Kracke, and others—the very juxtaposition of the usual sociological categories and of the historical material brings some clarification of certain simplifications that may be very often found in the literature of China. Thus, first, the fact that the distribution of wealth did not always follow on the distribution of prestige is not presented as an "aberration" of the classical Confucian-bureaucratic pattern or as a reason for bewailing the fate of the merchants, but indicates that the Chinese system of stratification, like that of any largescale centralized "bureaucratic" society was to some extent flexible, that certain degrees of "free floating" (i.e., not committed to descriptive units of various kinds) resources—whether power, wealth or prestige—
eciated in it and that although the official elite attempted to regulate and channelize these according to the criteria of 'Confucian' bureaucracy, they never fully succeeded and many secondary systems or subcultures of stratification continuously existed in China. Moreover, the importance of merchants and of military—factors often looked upon as exogenous, while in fact constituting a continuous part of social organization and very important channels of mobility into the literati group and the bureaucracy, and the existence of special bureaucratic-military sector—1—is brought out by Marsh's and even more by Ho's systematic description.

Their analysis also makes useful distinctions between the gentry, the literati and the bureaucracy to describe the place of the gentry and the literati in the local structure with great vividness.

Ho's analysis of the Chinese status system is much more elaborated and detailed than Marsh's—he goes into great detail to analyze both the different social strata in Chinese society and the major grades with the upper echelons of the literati and the bureaucracy, to show the origin of the official social ideology and the systematic reason for Confucian-legalism upholding of the fluidity of the status system—

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Despite some obvious ascriptive tendencies. He does also go in much greater detail into historical and sociological analysis of the different avenues of advance into the bureaucracy and sets the bureaucracy—which constitutes Marsh's main focus of analysis—within the wider context of the upper stratum of Chinese society, i.e., of the gentry and literati.

He does also attempt to analyze the process of downward mobility and shows how within/relatively static society with a fluid, open system of mobility such downward mobility was almost a historical or sociological necessity.

He does also analyze in great detail some of the intra family mechanisms (such as conspicuous consumption) which could contribute to such downward mobility.
In Marsh's case this general background material serves for the analysis of the determinants of bureaucratic advancement. Here he wants to test several major hypotheses, all dealing with the extent to which internal-bureaucratic seniority examinations—as against external (mainly familial) criteria determine the extent of bureaucratic advancement. In order to test these hypotheses he analyzes by carefully statistical methods—using most of the techniques of modern mobility studies—a sample of 572 officials from 'Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period.' (2)

2. He poses his problem in terms of alternative hypotheses.

I. The general hypothesis of Extra-Bureaucratic Determinants of Official Recruitment and Advancement:

A. Bureaucratic Recruitment path taken is a function of the stratum position of family of orientation:

1. Chinese from official families are more likely than Chinese from commoner families to (a) take the preferred path (the examination system); (b) receive the chin-shih degree.

B. Official advancement within the Ching bureaucracy is a function of the stratum position of family of orientation:

1. Manchu officials are more likely than Chinese from official families, and the latter more likely than
Chinese from commoner families to:
(a) reach given high-rank posts during their career,
(b) have a high rate of promotion,
(c) have longer incumbency in given high-rank posts,
(d) accumulate longer seniority.

II. The alternative general hypothesis of Bureaucratic Determinants of Official Recruitment and Advancement:

A. Official advancement within the Ch'ing bureaucracy was a function of impersonal, formal bureaucratic rules:

1. Officials recruited through the preferred regular path (examinations) are more likely than officials recruited through the irregular path to:
   (a) reach given high-rank posts,
   (b) have a high rate of promotion,
   (c) have a longer incumbency in given high-rank posts.

2. Official advancement (highest rank reached and length of incumbency in high-rank posts) is a function of the amount of seniority accumulated.

We shall, then, test hypotheses concerning the relative influence of (a) bureaucratic factors—recruitment path taken and seniority, and (b) extrabureaucratic factors—the stratum position of the family of orientation, upon (c) official advancement—highest rank reached and length of incumbency.

(pp. 31-32)
end of note
The main results of the study are summarized by him in the following way: ...To what extent is this general hypothesis (of predominance of extra-bureaucratic factors) supported by our findings? ...we found that incumbency in high-rank posts does vary directly with family stratum position, and that the relationship between recruitment path taken and rank reached is a spurious relationship, actually dependent upon family stratum position. It is partially supported by (the fact that) differences in official recruitment and advancement were correlated with ethnic differences between Manchus and Chinese, but were not correlated with stratum differences between Chinese from official and Chinese from commoner families. Third, the case for the priority of extra-bureaucratic influences is weakened by the fact that Chinese from official families in our sample are not more likely than Chinese from commoner families to receive the chin-shih or to receive it at a significantly younger age.

Perhaps the best simple summary thus far, then, is that the hypothesis of extra-bureaucratic influences on advancement is not fully supported, but only partially supported by our findings. 

(pp. 151-153)

...Perhaps our most important finding is that, among Chinese officials, seniority tended to equalize the chances of advancement for men from official and from commoner families--once they were in the bureaucracy. Furthermore, if the seniority rule enhanced the opportunities of some commoners' sons, it also did not retard the advancement of other, more exceptional commoners. The latter commoners' sons did not have to
adhere to the seniority principle, but instead had rapid ascent as a result of military successes and the like.

Although officials sought to use their position to advance the interests of their families, the resulting nepotism was thus constrained by the bureaucratic rules of seniority, recommendation, avoidance of kin while serving in office, and mutual responsibility for misdemeanors. This is not to say that an official’s commitment to his family ceased to impinge upon his official role. Rather, it took other forms, such as the “squeeze.”

...Families in China, as elsewhere, jealously guard the rights and privileges attached to their stratum position against encroachment and diminution. Unless adaptive structures develop, elite positions tend to be monopolized from generation to generation by a small, privileged minority of the population. One important adaptive structure which developed in China was the bureaucratization of the governmental administration. Insofar as an individual’s mobility chances became determined by the rules of this bureaucracy, the ascriptive tendencies of the family were undercut. The Chinese bureaucracy, like any bureaucracy, had as its functional prerequisites the maintenance of certain standards of administrative performance and the handling of new problems. The prerequisites could not have been met had nepotism been allowed to override the bureaucratic rules of seniority and merit. This is clearly the major implication of our findings. On the other hand, the bureaucracy was part of a more inclusive system, the society, where universalistic and other bureaucratic rules were much less operative. The bureaucratized segment was not able
to prevent the conferring of advantages on a kinship basis, before adult occupational recruitment took place, as well as at other points in the system. The result was that, as in other societies, the elite were recruited disproportionately from the 2 per cent of the population in the elite stratum, rather than from the 98 per cent of the population in the below-elite, or commoner, stratum..."
Ho's main contentions are more concerned with the processes of mobility in the wider context of the overall Chinese societal system and their influence on its working as well as the broader social and political determinants of such processes of mobility in different periods of Ming and Ch'ing dynasties.

He summarizes his main conclusions in the following way:

...Although the Ming-Ch'ing society, like the Chinese society of earlier periods, was a regulated society, we have found that the discrepancy between the social ideals embodied in legal texts and social realities was a very great one. Legally, the early Ming state prescribed that certain special-service statuses be hereditary; in fact, the complex social and economic forces, together with the lack of strong will on the part of the imperial government strictly to enforce the stringent law, made the maintenance of such special statuses impossible. In the Ming-Ch'ing period as a whole, the status system was fluid and flexible and there were no effective legal and social barriers which prevented the movement of individuals and families from one status to another."

(pp. 256-257)

"...Although this study deals with the last two dynasties in Chinese history, it may be useful in the final consideration to make some observations on the important changes in Chinese society and social mobility over a longer period. In retrospect, the T'ang period was an important transition during which the monopoly of political power by the early-medieval hereditary aristocracy was gradually broken up under the impact
of the competitive examination system. The fact that there was more social circulation during the T'ang than during the previous three centuries cannot be much doubted, although it is difficult to say whether the truly humble and poor had much chance of social success. Very little is known of the precise family background of prominent T'ang Chinese who owed their success to the examination. Even when T'ang literature and biographies refer to an individual's social origin as humble or lowly, the adjective must be interpreted in the T'ang social context. It is probable that such adjective as humble and lowly were used by contemporaries only in comparison with the hereditary aristocratic clans which, if they were no longer able to monopolize political power from the mid-seventh century onward, remained the dominant political factor and enjoyed unrivaled social prestige down to the very end of the T'ang period.

After the great T'ang clans finally declined amidst the incessant ward of the Five Dynasties (907-60) and the perpetuation of the examination system under the Sung (960-1279), Chinese society definitely became more mobile and the social composition of the ruling bureaucracy more broadened. An excellent recent study shows that of the early Sung (960-1126) officials with biographical entries in the History of the Sung Dynasty 46.1 per cent may be regarded as coming from han-ts'ui (literally humble clans or families); whereas officials of similar social origin constitute a mere 13.8 percent of the late T'ang (756-906) officials with biographical entries in the two Histories of the T'ang Dynasty. While within the limitations of dynastic histories the descriptions of the social origin of late T'ang and early Sung officials in the above study are as specific as can be expected, the key word "humble" must be inter-
interpreted in the T'ang context. For the Southern Sung period (1127-1279) two chin-shih lists with ancestral information are extant, which reveal that successful candidates from nonofficial families constituted 56.3 percent of the total of the class of 1148 and 57.9 percent of the total of the class of 1256.

(pp. 259-260)

"...The trend of increasing mobility continued after the founding of the Ming, when the examination and academic degree system became more elaborate and the school system truly nationwide. All this, together with the most unusual political and social circumstances in which the Ming dynasty was inaugurated, created a chapter of social mobility probably unparalleled in Chinese history. One of the important findings of this study is that Category A chin-shih figures were highest at the beginning of Ming times gradually became stabilized at a high level during the fifteenth and the greater part of the sixteenth centuries, began to decline drastically in the late sixteenth century, and further dropped to a stabilized low level of below 20 percent after the late seventeenth century. Other things being equal, members of successful families naturally had various competitive advantages and must in the long run prevail over the humble and poor in the competitive examination. It would appear that the chances of successful mobility for ordinary commoners would have begun to decline drastically earlier had it not been for the combined effect of the early stage of large-scale reproduction of basic classics and reference tools, the teachings of Wang Yang-ming, and the subsequent mushrooming growth of private academies. The rise of a large number of private academies, with their usual scholarship provisions, occurred just about the
If we hazard a speculation, we find that Chinese socioacademic mobility data do seem to have certain inferential value to an understanding of general social mobility. The trend in socioacademic mobility appears to concur in the main with what we conjecture to have been the trend in general social mobility in Ming-Ch'ing times, although not without lags. It is true that no statistical data on general social mobility for the Ming-Ch'ing period exist, but we do have a considerable amount of evidence on such changing factors as economic and social conditions, fiscal burden, standard of living, and population growth, factors which must have had some bearing on social mobility in general. Much of the evidence of this type has been analyzed in detail in my study of Ming-Ch'ing population and need not be repeated here.

Suffice it here to say that the early Ming period up to 1500 was one of peace, prosperity, government retrenchment, reduced fiscal burden, and steady agricultural and commercial expansion which, together with the government's unusually sympathetic attitude toward the upward mobility of the humble and the vast expansion of educational facilities, cannot have failed to have a beneficent effect on both types of mobility. Indeed, unless the combined economic, social, and institutional factors were unusually favorable to the upward mobility of the majority of the nation, it would be extremely hard for modern students to explain how the early Ming Chinese were able to achieve Category A chin-shih figures at such a sustained high level. The beginning of the first drastic decline in Category A figures in the late sixteenth century coincided almost exactly
with the beginning of a period in which the consequence of misgovernment
and the mounting fiscal burden of the people seem to have more than off-
set the effect of an increasingly variegated economy.

The only significant period of lag between our conjectured general
mobility trend and that of socioacademic mobility is the one falling
roughly between 1683 and 1775 (or possibly ending slightly earlier).
During this period the power and prestige of the Ch'ing empire reached
its apogee and the nation enjoyed prolonged peace, material prosperity,
a lenient fiscal burden, an improved living standard, and an unprecedented
population growth. The only factor that may have had some adverse effect
on general social mobility during this period of contentment was the
increasing concentration of landownership in the Yangtze region. The
combined economic and institutional factors were so favorable that even
the rapid and sustained population growth was viewed by contemporaries,
up to about 1775, as an almost unqualified blessing. Yet, owing to the
government's restrictive chin-shih quotas, the Category A figures show a
further decline from the late Ming level.

(pp. 264-265)
It is, of course, difficult for a non-sinologist to evaluate the studies from the point of view of use of sources and to compare them with other studies on mobility, such as those of Hsu or Kracke.

It seems that the major problem here would be that of the sources used by Marsh. He, himself, fully recognizes that first, the 'Eminent Chinese' does not contribute a statistical sample from which generalizations could be made to a larger, determinate population (p. 1910. However, this source is, of course, by its very nature, a biased one in favor of the more 'officially' (i.e. both organizationally and ideologically) approved people.

Other sources, such as various local chronicles or a fuller roster of the materials about all central elite positions could modify his results.

Moreover, it might have been, perhaps, useful and interesting if Marsh would have traced the different career patterns—in terms of type of jobs and departments—of different bureaucrats.

As far as a non-sinologist can judge Ho is more aware of the unreliability of many of the sources and is more cautious in using them, while at the same time shows himself to be a master of them.

But whatever the limitations or modifications of Marsh's conclusions that may have resulted from such suggestions, such modifications would still be set within the framework of his hypotheses—and it is this framework that is important for the evaluation of the juxtaposition of
sociological and historical methods in analysis of historical societies.

Both these studies indicate the possibility or beginning of a coming together of sociological and historical methods for the analysis of social procession an institutional structure in historical societies.

While Marsh shows a greater predilection for formal hypotheses and the use of some of the modern research techniques developed by the social scientists his analysis is weaker on the level of the overall institutional structure. This level is picked up much more masterfully by Ho.

A continuous combination of these two approaches could certainly greatly advance the contributions of sociological analysis to the understanding of historical societies and of such analyses for the testing of sociological hypotheses. But in order to be able to appreciate fully the potential contribution of these approaches it is necessary to put them in the context of the study of the sociological problem to which they address themselves, i.e. studies of mobility and of bureaucracy.
Studies of mobility have been for a long period in one of the forefronts of sociological inquiry. Many studies in different countries—in the United States, England, Scandinavia, Germany, France, Japan, and many other countries—have analyzed the scope of social mobility, i.e., the extent to which sons follow the occupations of their fathers or do better or worse than their fathers, and conversely the extent to which different occupational positions are filled from the sons of their occupants.

Some of these studies have tested hypotheses about the differences in the rate of mobility in various modern societies, others have provided very broad statistical-demographical studies and descriptions of the changes in the patterns of organization of different occupations. Still others were concerned primarily with methodology. Most of these studies have been very succinctly summed up and critically evaluated by S. M. Miller's trend report. This very able survey brings out sharply that the great proliferation of these different studies has not been overstated by a concomitant development in the posing of the questions or problems which the study of mobility has to answer. Some of the more specific studies, as for instance those analyzing the conditions of the supply of talents to different occupations or in the blocking of such opportunities through different systems of educational selection and

their relation to class structure have a very definite focus. Such focuses may also be found in other—less numerous—studies which deal with the effects of mobility on "class consciousness" or on the professional and occupational orientations of different groups.

But many of the other numerous studies on mobility have not made explicit or operationalized their implicit assumptions about the nature of mobility as a social mechanism and about its influence on the operation of the social structures within which they take place. It has been, of course, generally recognized that the process of mobility is an important mechanism for the placement of the available human personnel in different social positions, of the differential redistribution of population to each position and sometimes of creation of new social groups and positions. Similarly it has been generally recognized that there exists some close relationship between the processes of such placement and redistribution and the continuity of a given structure or system or with different changes which take place within it.

But which aspects of this process are most important for the understanding of the functioning of a given social system? Which contribute to its stability and which generate changes and what kind of changes? To what extent are these different aspects of mobility and their effects common to all societies, or do they differ between them? Do we have systematic knowledge about influence of different patterns of mobility on the availability of talent for different social and cultural positions? Often some general assumptions that certain circulation of elites may be good for the keeping up of fresh blood into the central functions of a
society, or that mobility is good—at least for a democratic society—can be found in the literature. But there have been, as Miller's survey clearly shows, relatively few systematic analyses of existing materials to test or operationalize these assumptions.

But while some of these problems could perhaps to some extent be neglected in studies of mobility in modern societies they became much more pertinent and when the study of mobility became transplanted to historical societies.

The very materials presented by Marsh and Ho—as well as the broad contours of the Chinese society which they study—underline the necessity and importance of studying some of these broader problems. To mention just a few of such problems which come out of his materials and of the study of Chinese society: How did the mobility from different strata and/or regions influence the identification of these groups with the broad political and cultural structure? When did either different rates of mobility from different groups, strata and regions or concentration of mobility in special channels—i.e., in the military and the blocking of other channels—i.e., of the “usual” examination system—influence this identification? How did these different patterns of mobility influence the availability of sufficient manpower to the main positions in the society, in the bureaucracy, and how did they affect the functioning of the different echelons and departments of the bureaucracy? What institutional changes were generated by such changes in the processes of mobility? To what extent was the famous “dynastic cycle connected with such changes in the rates and channels of mobility—as
some historians have ensured? Which social and political conditions did generate favorable rates of mobility and under what conditions were the less favorable rates and channels developed?

It is important to emphasize that in posing all these questions we have to deal only with differential rates of mobility but also with different institutional channels of mobility—i.e., whether it went through the examination system, through wealth, or through the army. This is especially important in the study of the Chinese case where mobility was set within the relatively stable society and where perhaps the clearest type of "Sponsored" mobility—i.e., of mobility which is sponsored and regulated by an elite, oriented towards recruitment to relatively limited and clear elite patterns—could be found.

Similar questions can be posed also with regard to other historical societies and systems—whether with regard to other centralized societies, like the Roman or Byzantine Empires—or with regard to other types of historical societies, like the feudal society. Marc Bloch's classic analysis of the two feudal ages and of the changes in the composition and background of the aristocratic groups in each of these stages is a good example of a possible approach to such materials.

Needless to say, it is easier to pose these questions than to answer them. But it seems that it is necessary to pose such—or similar—questions in order that the studies of mobility could answer the questions and problems which are implicitly posed by them. To some extent, historical societies in which the rate of institutional change was slower or more controlled may perhaps constitute a useful starting point for such an approach, although, needless to say, similar approaches can and should be attempted in the study of mobility in modern societies.
A similar range of problems can be pointed out with regard to the study of bureaucracy and of its different structural characteristics. Most of historical and sociological studies of bureaucracy were greatly influenced by Max Weber's "ideal type" analysis of bureaucracy and, to a smaller extent, by the works of such historians like Hintze or Schmoller—and by the later works of political scientists like Friedrich or Finer or sociologists like Merton, Barnard and Simon. They have often focused on the extent to which any concrete administration—as it developed in any given historical setting—deviated from some of the characteristics of the 'ideal type' or was nearer to some of the 'patri-monial bureaucracies' described by Weber. One natural focus of such analysis has been the extent to which any such bureaucracy really maintained its own autonomy in the selection of officials and in their advancement or, conversely, the extent to which it was influenced by 'external' criteria and forces—such as family, kinship—forces which exist in every society, but the nature of which does necessarily vary from one type of society to another—as does, of course, also, the extent of their influence.

As we have seen, Marsh focuses his analysis on some of the criteria which are most relevant for the Chinese setting—i.e., whether gentry or bureaucratic family connection—and he pays special attention to the spe-

cial position of the Manchus. But just as the studies of mobility raised the question about the more general problems which they can help in solving, so do also these different studies of bureaucracy. Here the existing literature provides us with some more systematic hints and possibilities of approach. Basically, two interconnected approaches seem to be possible. One may deal with the extent to which different patterns of recruitment to the bureaucracy may influence its working, the extent to which they may influence its rationality and efficiency. Here one could trace the influence of different patterns of recommitment on the internal division of labor of a bureaucracy, the success in recruiting adequate personnel to different types of activities and departments and on the extent to which such personnel was capable to perform the different bureaucratic jobs—become negligent of the, or tended to innovate new tasks, to undertake reforms, etc. A parallel, but not necessarily identical analysis would be that of the influence of the scope of recruitment to the bureaucracy from different strata—i.e., the extent to which this may influence not only the performance of specific tasks in the bureaucracy but also social or political orientations of the bureaucracy or of its upper echelons.

This last brings us to the second aspect, namely, to the extent to which the bureaucracy, or its different echelons, develop political attitudes of their own and the extent to which these orientations are compatible with the basic premises of the political system within which they operate. Here, many of the studies touch directly on the studies of mobility—and to a very great extent they are identical or very closely
overlapping. They necessarily suffer from the lack of explanation of many of their hidden assumptions. But it is here again that some of the most baffling and interesting problems can be discerned and the juxtaposition of the two complexes of studies—those of mobility and those of bureaucracy, especially through the study of differential mobility into the bureaucracy—can be very promising and important. Marsh's own analysis does only touch on these problems and any attempt to undertake them fully would necessitate a much more variegated methodological approach and use of different types of historical sources. There are but a few monographs which make any such attempt. Perhaps the closest single example is Rosenberg's analysis on the development of the Prussian bureaucracy. Truly enough, he tends to use various historical sources in the more traditional manner, but the ways in which he uses them is much more sophisticated than most, although here also only some of his basic sociological assumptions are made explicit. A matching of his approach with that of Marsh and No could certainly be very welcome and fruitful. It would be fruitful within the analysis of any simple society, but to answer these questions and problems fully would necessitate going beyond the analysis of any single historical case and leaning heavily on comparative analysis because only such an analysis somehow approaches the differential weights of the different social factors hypothesized in such different analyses.

In this way the sociological approach—especially if it is based on comparative analysis—can explicate and list some of the assumptions and hypotheses formed by many sociological and historical works dealing with the interrelations between patterns of mobility and the functioning and political orientations and identification of bureaucracies.  

8. One possible approach of this type has been attempted by the reviewer in S. N. Eisenstadt, The Political Systems of Empires, New York, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, see especially ch. XI.
These conclusions may also indicate some of the general problems of sociological study of historical societies. Such a study may go in two different directions. One is the analysis of any single historical society and of its development or changes. In such cases the historical society is usually treated as a social system which is investigated either in its 'totality' (if indeed such a term is meaningful), or, more often, in one of its basic institutional aspects (i.e., political, religious, economic, etc.). Such an approach may be not dissimilar from the approach of social anthropologists that attempted to analyze either the whole of a primitive society or, more often lately, some particular institutional aspect thereof—except that the conceptual and methodological tools used by anthropologists to study 'simple' societies are not always fully adequate to deal with the problems of the more 'complex' ones, and a combination of some of the anthropologists' overtaken with the more refined tools of sociological macro-analysis has to be employed.9

In all such cases of the study of any simple historical society the special contribution of the sociologists to the study of a historical society can be in two different, yet complimentary, directions. One is a methodological direction, i.e., an attempt to apply some of the methods developed in the social sciences to historical data and sources.10 The other contribution would be through the application of more rigorous

conceptual tools and Problemstellung about the nature of different social forces, institutions and processes. It is mainly in these ways that sociological analysis can explicate and put to test many of the various implicit and often ad hoc assumptions which can frequently be found in many of the best historical treatises about the working of societies or the nature of social institutions.11

Such explication and testability of these assumptions becomes even more articulated in the second major approach which the sociologist may develop with regard to historical societies—namely in the comparative approach—i.e., when either certain types of social, political, economic structure (e.g., feudal system) or certain aspects of such institutional structures—their conditions of development and change—are compared between different societies. It is almost only through such approach that the various implicit assumptions which can be so often found in both historical and sociological works can be fully explicated or tested. Obviously such an approach cannot come in the place of historical analysis proper, but it can greatly help in its systemization and in the bringing out some of its implicit assumptions and it constitutes, from the sociologist's point of view, a basic part of the study of the nature of society, of processes of institutionalization and of social change.