



THE MECHANISM OF INCULTURATION IN CHILDHOOD: CULTUROLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: The article examines various approaches to defining the concepts of "socialization" and "inculturation." Inculturation, understood as the process of mastering and appropriating culture in childhood, constitutes the primary goal of society. It is emphasized that by participating in this process, the child not only absorbs all key cultural ideas and the interconnections between them, but also adopts behavioral patterns and reaction strategies for a wide spectrum of possible situations.

Keywords: childhood, inculturation, values, individual, cultural anthropology, socialization.

Individual development of every person begins with a gradual entry and inclusion into the surrounding world. From early childhood, an individual internalizes accepted manners of behavior and modes of thought until most of them become habitual. This integration into the world occurs through the acquisition of a necessary body of knowledge, norms, values, patterns, and behavioral skills, allowing the individual to function as a full-fledged member of society.

The fundamental reason for this process lies in the fact that human social behavior is not biologically programmed by nature; thus, an individual must repeatedly re-learn how to perceive and respond to the surrounding environment. This process of mastering the norms of social life and culture is designated in various humanistic disciplines by the terms "inculturation" and "socialization." Inculturation is a lifelong process of acquiring the traditions, customs, values, and norms of one's native culture, as well as the study and transmission of culture from one generation to another. The ultimate result of inculturation is a culturally sophisticated individual (*intelligentsia*) rather than merely a personality, as is the case with socialization.

A culturally sophisticated individual represents an aggregation of acquired cultural norms. As is well known, the term was introduced by the prominent American cultural anthropologist Melville Herskovits in his work *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. The concept of "inculturation" is central to M. Herskovits in constructing his holistic cultural-anthropological framework. It is precisely within the process of



cultural integration that the mechanisms of reproducing ethnocultural communities and the potential for societal (cultural) transformation manifest themselves. Herskovits considered the acquisition of the activity-based and behavioral dimensions of culture, as well as various aspects of spiritual culture during inculturation, to be the core element of his theory [4].

At approximately the same time, Kluckhohn introduced the semantically similar term "culturalization," as the pre-existing term "socialization" did not fully encompass the processes of internalizing the cognitive aspects of culture (knowledge, beliefs, values). Inculturation denoted both the process of cultural initiation and the outcome of this process. In a narrow sense, inculturation refers to the acquisition of cultural norms and values by a child; in a broader sense, it is understood as a process not limited to early childhood, encompassing the assimilation of cultural patterns by an adult individual.

The concept of inculturation has faced criticism due to the ambiguity of its meaning [3]; furthermore, it essentially duplicated the far more widely used term "socialization," while its origin was directly linked to a somewhat unjustified attempt to oppose society to culture. In modern psychological literature, a clear differentiation between the semantically close concepts of inculturation and socialization has not yet been established. The term "inculturation" did not gain widespread adoption and was utilized predominantly within American anthropology [1].

The difficulty in defining the term "inculturation" stems largely from the fact that it is studied across social psychology, ethnography, cultural and social anthropology, ethnopedagogy, and related fields. The necessity of establishing its own conceptual framework and methodology is driven significantly by the new status of culture in the contemporary world, where it becomes a crucial driver of societal development. Throughout the 20th century, folk traditions were progressively marginalized within the cultural space, replaced by mass culture. However, in the final quarter of the 20th century, a series of global events gave rise to what is termed the "ethnic paradox of modernity."

On the one hand, there is a leveling of spiritual and social culture driven by globalization processes; on the other hand, there is a distinct effort to preserve one's identity at the level of a specific ethnic group—an emphasis on ethnic self-identification. An active search for "national roots" emerges. Most scholars argue that culture is "appropriated" precisely during childhood, making it the primary domain where ethnicity takes shape. Psychology has focused its attention on examining the characteristics of childhood, as well as factors determining mental development during this period and its subsequent impact on adult life.

As a result of these studies, it was possible to specify the principles of



value system formation during childhood under the influence of factors such as time, environmental context, and pedagogical traditions. Examining the history of childhood in the primitive era using ethnographic data demonstrates that although the period of growing up varied among primitive peoples, certain common characteristics can be identified: child and adult statuses were generally strictly separated and precisely defined; adult roles were clearly delineated and not overly complex; society lacked a concept of childhood that attributed special meanings and values distinct from the adult world; and the social systems of primitive peoples were relatively simply structured, based on tradition and ancestor veneration, meaning the past of adults inevitably became the future for new generations.

The mechanism of adult formation relied heavily on imitation. The material world of human culture that a child masters serves as a kind of "touchstone" for a social-human way of life. Objective forms of culture, once transformed into the content of a child's activity, acquire a functionally new role as material. Upon this material, a comprehensive testing of human capacities and orientation within the realm of relationships and objects takes place. Consequently, the child not only appropriates but also creates culture; more precisely, the culture-creating function of society is uniquely refracted through the child's activity. Understanding childhood within the context of its culture-creating potential simultaneously allows for a deeper insight into the mechanisms of inculturation dominant in traditional childhood.

Thus, inculturation as a process of mastering and appropriating culture in childhood serves as a primary goal of society. Participating in this process, the child not only assimilates all foundational cultural ideas and their interrelations but also internalizes reaction strategies for a full spectrum of situations, including unexpected ones. In this regard, children's folklore vividly demonstrates the mechanism of a child's entry into culture. We posit that children's folklore (counting rhymes, short rhymes, tongue twisters, proverbs, fairy tales, riddles) constitutes one of the key factors enabling effective inculturation.

Throughout childhood, an individual masters national culture and forms a worldview characteristic of their people's mentality. The significance of infancy and early childhood folklore lies in laying down this mental foundation. The period of "conscious childhood" is accompanied by folklore that preserves the adult worldview, transformed into a child's perspective. During this stage, the core semantic part of the system is formed, primarily in an archived, metaphorized state: basic stereotypes are integrated into the system but are not yet fully conceptualized.

In adolescence, these stereotypes are unarchived through trial in real and



play situations; hence, the primary characteristics of folklore during this period are dynamism, openness, and assertiveness. The meanings embedded during the inculturation process begin to transform into personal life experience with the onset of youth (which simultaneously marks early adulthood), where familiar children's folklore intensively intersects and merges with adult folklore. Children's folklore completes its transmissive influence, marking the end of the early inculturation period.

Childhood is a complex sociocultural phenomenon; it represents an authentic unity and an entry into the cultural sphere through inculturation. In traditional culture, the mission of inculturation falls largely upon children's folklore as the primary means of communication with and development of the child.

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