

A Reply to Wood

It is impossible in a brief letter to correct all of Dr. Wood's misapprehensions, whether about my article in particular or the Mappilla outbreaks in general. Therefore, I shall comment only on two of the more important aspects of his discussion: his interpretation of my underlying argument, and the more general question of the role of the Mappilla 'ulama in the nineteenth-century outbreaks. Insofar as he raises questions about the pre-British period, I must refer readers to my forthcoming articles in *South Asia* (1976) and *Modern Asian Studies* (1977).

Wood has failed to understand and therefore misrepresents my underlying argument. Since I assume that he has actually read the introduction and first section of my article, I can only attribute his comments to the fairly primitive economic determinism that, although hedged about with factual knowledge, informs his comments both here and in his other articles. I don't know how else to explain his inability to perceive that I view the Mappilla outbreaks to be the result of a complex interaction of social and ideological factors with an important historical dimension. My point in the article is not that the Mappilla outbreaks were solely the product of the fevered imagination of a few members of the 'ulama, but that the outbreaks would not have occurred if the 'ulama had not articulated the ideology that justified and sanctioned these attacks. This, I argued, seemed to be the only way to explain why the outbreaks were concerned with doctrinal as well as social and economic issues.

This leads to a second, closely related point, the role Wood assigns to the Mappilla 'ulama and to ideology generally in the nineteenth-century outbreaks. There are two points to be noticed here. First, he has not questioned any of the evidence linking the 'ulama, particularly Sayyid Fazl, with the early outbreaks. He simply ignores this and asserts that the variation in the rate of the outbreaks can be understood solely in terms of the legislative activity of the Madras Government. Second, he is not really interested in the role of the 'ulama or that of ideology in general. This seems to be partially the result of the fact that the British were almost completely ignorant of Mappilla religious organization; this is reflected in their records and consequently Wood's own comments. However, Dr. Wood's lack of interest in these topics also seems to reflect his own ideological proclivities, which make it difficult for him to imagine that illiterate, nineteenth-century Muslim peasants do not act like twentieth-century secular intellectuals. As a partial antidote, I would suggest a careful reading of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, a good example of how sophisticated Marxist analysis illuminates rather than obscures complex social phenomena.

STEPHEN F. DALE

Ohio State University

Japanese Social History

Henry DeWitt Smith II's dyspeptic review of my *Japanese Urbanism* (*JAS* XXXV, 4, August 1976, pp. 690-92) forces to mind, in a curious fashion, an important topic for historians of Asia that I would like to address briefly: social history and its definition. Although he claims to agree with my plea for a new social history and with my approach, Smith and I actually have quite irreconcilable views on what these should be.

This first became apparent to me at a University of Pennsylvania seminar on the social history of modern Japan, organized by Professor Hilary Conroy and some of his graduate students in spring 1974. That seminar showed our differences to be profound, and to rest on fundamentally opposite conceptions of the historian's task. At the core of the dispute is a basic conflict concerning the proper scope of inquiry. I feel we should analyze the behavior of as large a span of Japanese society as is possible with the material at our disposal, including both the articulate and the inarticulate, everyone from power holders at the center to the poorest village peasant. Smith, on the other hand, was quite candid at the 1974 seminar in expressing his contempt for this approach, claiming that people at the bottom of society do not really influence history. Convincing evidence of his methodological position is available in the form of his own monograph; it is essentially an intellectual history of participants in a short-lived political sect who were drawn from a tiny, elite segment of modern Japanese society: University of Tokyo graduates. Moreover, Smith has yet to publish (under his sole authorship) major scholarly pieces dealing with non-elite subjects. Finally, an elitist orientation apparently blinded him to fully half the pages in *Japanese Urbanism*, where the book analyzed employment relations in Japanese industry, the political implications of those relations, and/or the collective behavior of industrial workers. These topics are absolutely central to an understanding of the book, but, puzzling as it may be, they go virtually unmentioned in Smith's review. (Also unmentioned are several cross-cultural comparisons that contradict his claims of ethnocentrism.)

Smith's acts of omission are distressing not only because they caused him to misrepresent a book, but also because they are symptomatic of a broader problem. The term "social history" is very imprecise, and it is subject to widespread abuse. "Social history" can be undertaken by historians as different as a literary intellectual studying the ideas of a revolutionary movement and a sociologist examining long-term alterations in political structure. I submit, however, that two such "social historians" are actually engaged in radically disparate undertakings; their sources, approaches, goals, and assumptions all differ significantly.

A comparison of these two historians at work helps explain this claim. The intellectual historian will very likely rely exclusively on written records. He will read and assess them employing rather subjective categories of interpretation, for his purpose is to illuminate a specific cultural context at a given point in time and space. And he will assume that he can understand the movement itself by appreciating the ideas of its leaders, who are a minority of the participants. The sociological historian, on the other hand, will employ written records, but he will also use quantitative data and perhaps even conduct interviews. He will quite likely combine the use of theory and cross-cultural comparison, because his purpose is to analyze his subject in the light of human experience that spans broad stretches of time and space. Finally, he will assume that he must examine problems holistically, in order to understand human behavior in the widest possible social context. This latter point is of special importance to historians of modern Asia, who run the risk of serious misunderstanding if they fail to explore relationships among all classes in society and the implications of those relationships.

It may be useful to expand even further the meaning of social history as the "sociological" historian conceives it. In this view, human behavior is molded by a wide range of factors, among which articulated ideas are of relatively minor importance for most members of a society. The individual is not viewed as the principal agent of his own destiny. Rather, human behavior is seen as the product of changing roles, statuses, and

attitudes shaped by a structurally complex and dynamic society. To understand history, therefore, the social historian—or more accurately, the “sociological” historian—would want to examine the relationships between changing social, political, and economic structures, in a context of collective human behavior. He would not confine his investigations to the articulate, the privileged, the powerful. Although he would study them, he would *also* study the inarticulate, the underprivileged, the powerless—in order to illuminate the constantly shifting relationships that shape decisions, deference, and demeanor in all societies. He would use theory and comparison to inform his findings; and he would probably qualify his conclusions with terms like “some,” “more,” and “many” because he appreciates the precarious and probabilistic nature of human behavior. In many fundamental ways, therefore, this view of history differs from what is called the humanistic tradition of historical inquiry, which celebrates individuals and ideas while neglecting collectivities and behavior.

It is to the foregoing definition of social history that I subscribe. I do not think it is, or should be, the only approach to historical research, nor do I mean to imply that other approaches are less valuable. I simply feel that some historians of Asia should consider the potential contribution of adopting what—if one dare not call it “new”—seems at least to be a *different* perspective on the historian’s task, because it might lead to creative insights. Having undertaken the task, one can then hope it will, in time, be evaluated with some discernment and objectivity—even by those of other historical persuasions.

GARY D. ALLINSON

University of Pittsburgh

On Translation

In the interest of promoting more efficient communication and enhancing graduate education, I would be grateful for a little space in which to air my views on translation.

Translation is generally regarded as either an elementary or an overly complex exercise. Too often it is regarded as merely a matter of individual preference, hence warranting little general discussion, unless one engages in professional translation, new technology for it, applied linguistics, or the like. Having read recent publications in several fields and talked with colleagues, I beg to differ.

Before raising the issues, let us agree on the obvious. Decisions on the mode of translation often involve several dimensions. First, the choice of style: should the translation be literal, permissibly free, rendered quite lyrical, given an extended nuance for clarity or emphasis, stretched somewhat to go along with a certain interpretation, and so on? Another aspect is that of cross-cultural perspective: how to indicate something in one culture by a counterpart in another, across the barriers of respective cultural contexts? (E.g., should the old Chinese elite be called “the gentry”?) A third and related dimension may appear: how to adjust a translated term to fit a given discipline? (E.g., can “training” in an earlier translation now read “socialization,” in the interest of mid-twentieth century sociology or even political science?) A fourth dimension is whether or not to make a temporal adjustment; e.g., should a piece in classical Japanese be translated in old English or current English? A fifth dimension is something like the Heisenberg Principle of Uncertainty in physics. When one particular meaning of a word gets pinned down, this imparts other connotations or implications.