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Area studies

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1. Academic Coverage

With some interesting exceptions, it is fair to term our past approach to area studies as one of "academic coverage." And it is clear that we are leaving this general type of concern behind us, partly because of new spenders on the scene, partly because much has already been accomplished, and even more because other problems in understanding demand our attention.

Nonetheless, we must be on the lookout for important gaps in American coverage of foreign areas, though this effort would be more of a mopping-up operation than a general program concern. In my area, there is a problem in geographic coverage; Okinawa and Korea should receive more American scholarly attention. While waiting for opportunities to encourage sound scholarship on such countries, we might go out and convince people like Scalapino and George Taylor to spend a month or so in Korea and Okinawa on their Asian jaunts. An occasional fellowship for a young American might also be in order.

There are of course other sorts of gaps. If it seems improbable that consistent attention to Asian arts will be given by the universities, we might hope that the Asia Society develops a function of directly servicing academic institutions. This might be most feasible in the Metropolitan New York area. On the fringe of the scholarly world, I see two important gaps and hereby propose consideration of two programs: First, a limited number

of individual grants for three years to enable correspondents to write interpretive studies in depth on non-Western areas and problems, and second, an experimental program of five training fellowships in foreign areas for writers-directors in television, perhaps three from the networks and two from educational TV.

Still and all, I am anxious to divert our attention from coverage and gaps to the following thoughts.

## 2. The Intellectual Framework

I won't pretend that these comments yet amount to much more than a miscellaneous collection. I suspect though that further reading and thought might lead us to consider a broad program of research grants for mature scholars dealing with the history of non-Western societies in transition. If I am right, there is not sufficient support for such studies from ACLS, SSRC and the area programs.

The approximate boundries for our proper concern with interpretive studies of foreign societies are indicated by Wittfogel's tome, Cyril Black's study of Russian modernization, Benjamin Schwartz' work on modern Chinese intellectual history, works on modern Japan by Jansen, Butow and others, the proposal on tropical history which we declined, Claire Holt's work on Indonesian art forms in transition, Hsiao's book on rural control in China and Willard Hanna's letters on Indonesia. This seems a jagged piece of scholarly terrain, and it is difficult to put my essential theme in a nutshell; perhaps we are dealing with cashews, almonds, pecans and other nuts in a single dish.

My first point is that all of these studies deal explicitly with the connection between traditional and contemporary societies. If some have a more limited chronological scope, they are nonetheless based on deep concern for the nature of important aspects of transition. It may be a truism that any good piece of historical scholarship clarifies the nature of change, but I think the people cited above show a special appreciation of the frantic pace and perplexing nature of change in



modern Asia. Each in his own way is unusually conscious about his conceptual framework and thus contributes to Western historiography in general.

I would also observe that the humanists dealing broadly with transition are most often plunging into a study of the analytical contributions of the social sciences. In my area, the reverse is even more important; social anthropologists are exhibiting more historical imagination than the historians themselves and the first decent work on important sequences in modern Indonesian history has been done by the geographer Karl Pelzer. The sociologist Marion Levy is perhaps the most promising social historian on modern China, though another sociologist, C.K. Yang, is doing impressive work. Perhaps my only point in this paragraph is that the basic orientation of the social science disciplines often provides questions of a sufficient order of generality to permit sound observations at various stages of a hectic transition period.

Perhaps it is this marked intrusion of social science viewpoints into the humanities fields which makes comparative studies on non-Western societies seem so attractive. On the other hand, a trend toward comparative interests is also being encouraged by the increasing concern of the social scientist for history. I have the impression, however, that through investigation would reveal few fully justified proposals in "comparative history," since our basic knowledge of individual non-Western societies is usually so spotty. There is of course little point in hoping for too much from interpretive studies on transition if our knowledge of the starting point is insufficient. When the society looms so overwhelmingly important as China, we must be ready to consider support for work which can best illuminate relatively unknown precontemporary periods. The proposal on Mind biography has, I believe, this unusual justification.

On the whole, I think that our increasing concern with the non-Western world demands that we be more receptive than ever to unusually promising proposals from individuals in the areas sketched above. Specifically, we should remain alert to opportunities to encourage consideration of historiography as related to non-Western themes, particularly where we see intelligent concern for the relationships between the social sciences and humanities. We must wrestle with our friends across the hall about ways to encourage the social scientists to work with more historical depth. We might go so far as to solicit proposals on colonial and post colonial institutional history. Literate biography, based on sound scholarship, should be actively encouraged, if possible. If developments in scholarship and training in the last fifteen years have not brought about a situation where proposals of the approximate sort would be forthcoming, then I am simply wrong. I could be set straight, in that case, by specific comments from all of you on your own areas.

These thoughts lead to only two specific suggestions, first, that we try to get a better proposal from Arthur Wright and the Association for Asian Studies for a Villa conference on approaches to modern Asian history, insisting that the basic concern of the meeting be worked out jointly with social scientists of stature and, second, that we make available, not passively but à la LAPP, a limited number of grants for mature scholars to work on "bridge" studies of non-Western society in transition, preferably with an emphasis on institutional studies dealing with pre- and post-colonial societies.