

## Correspondence

Robert Cole's review of *Modern Japanese Organization and Decision-Making*

One can only admire the sincerity of Professor Cole, who is willing to take on everyone connected with the Social Science Research Conference on modern Japanese organization.

It is of course the prerogative of an enterprising young scholar to reject categorically all scholars who deviate from what he considers to be the one correct approach. *Naruhodo*, Professor Cole, an orange may be judged as a very poor apple, but is it not possible there is more than one kind of fruit? Is it possible to understand Japan only if one uses Professor Cole's favorite terms? Among other things, Professor Cole says conference participants should have used the concepts current in certain American social science literature rather than concepts used by Japanese. Ethnocentrism anyone?

Judging apples as oranges is grossly unfair to scholars in the field who contributed to this conference, and excessively rigid as guidelines for young people embarking on research. It is unfair to the scholars who contributed to this conference because it detracts from their impressive original contributions. Rather than judge their value by whether these authors used a particular style or concept, I suggest another way to judge the value of these papers. I ask the reader to examine the best works available in Western languages on the topics covered by the conference participants that were available before the conference, then to look at the conference papers, and to judge whether he has learned anything new. Having been in close touch with the paper writers for the conference, I can testify that they did an enormous amount of work preparing their papers, which drew on years of solid research.

Cole's guidelines are too rigid for scholars embarking on research because they set such narrow standards for acceptable work; if one were to try to follow Professor Cole's particular guidelines it would inhibit creative work. Fortunately, few are likely to be bound by such narrow scientism. Nor would it be fair even to Professor Cole to judge the value of his work only by the narrow standards he sets out.

On two issues raised by Professor Cole, I must take responsibility for helping to guide this particular conference in a direction different from what he and some others might have done. An organizer of any such conference is confronted with the question of how to build on research to try to push the frontiers of understanding; reasonable men would choose different answers. I personally felt that a conference designed to understand modern Japanese organization and decision-making could add most at this point by drawing on a wide range of disciplines to explore the complexity of the Japanese scene as applied to social science. Within the confines of a limited budget for a very small group, I tried to select conference participants who represented a broad range of disciplines and who were familiar with Western social science concepts and who also combined this with an intimate knowledge of modern Japanese organization. Although one can think of many other excellent scholars who could have contributed to many of these topics had numbers not had to be limited, I doubt that many could criticize in general the impressive high quality of the participants selected in their respective disciplines and topics.

Secondly, I chose not to organize the conference around any general theoretical

scheme. There are obviously cases when a narrow theoretical perspective can fruitfully pull together varied research efforts. However, given the wide variety of theoretical perspectives of the small number of good studies on modern Japanese organization, I firmly believe that at this point it is more helpful to the field to have cross-fertilization among these varied perspectives rather than to try to force these scholars into a narrower mold. Obviously, there are stages in the development of the field where it is fruitful to bring together people with a more narrow range of theoretical perspectives. Despite Professor Cole's intolerance for other approaches, I hope he has an opportunity to organize participants for such a conference when the state of the field warrants it.

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#### Reply to Vogel

If it is narrow scientism to ask that American social scientists working on organizational decision-making draw upon the theoretical and empirical contributions of their social science colleagues as a starting point, then we ought simply to abandon any pretensions of social science as a cumulative enterprise. If it is ethnocentrism to suggest that scholars contributing to a study of Japanese organizational decision-making make use of such concepts as power, then we might as well abandon our effort to develop social science generalizations. If these guidelines be too narrow or rigid for Japan specialists, I can understand only too well the low esteem in which area studies is held in the social science disciplines.

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