

Editorial Foreword

Landed Wealth and Social Status. Each of these articles addresses questions that have their place at the very foundation of modern social science. Karin MacHardy's study of noble responses to rising Habsburg absolutism raises classic issues about European state making, including the relations of crown and aristocracy, the role of religious division, and the importance of landed wealth (in *CSSH* see Sutton, 2:1; De Battaglia, 5:1; Armstrong, 14:1; Markoff, 17:4; and Heper, 27:1). William Lavelly and R. Bin Wong's analysis of China's system of equal inheritance raises classic issues about different ways of preserving and dividing landed estates, including their effects on social structure, social mobility, and family size. A list of the important essays written on these topics over the last two centuries would include most of the famous names of European and American anthropology, history, and sociology; and it is worth remembering why these topics have been so central. They focus on qualities universally identified as distinctive characteristics of the modern world. To explain the rise of centralized states and individual market relations would be to explain the origins of modern, industrial society (and why England, then Western Europe and the United States created it first). Within this larger explanation, these specific topics have an additional appeal. They are the nodes where structure and culture meet, where landed wealth intersects bureaucratization, religion, and status; kinship, inheritance, and mobility. The two articles in this issue share other qualities as well. Remarkably, considering the richness of the relevant literature, each has new, important points to make; each uses original research and quantitative analysis to gain an independent perspective on specific issues and then on the larger issues; each demonstrates that some interpretations thought to be in conflict can in fact be reconciled. MacHardy achieves this by looking at structural data in a new way and then connecting these findings to culture, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Lavelly and Wong achieve this through a careful demographic analysis that allows them to separate rich and poor peasants and show the differential effects of a Chinese system of family ownership for which Western theories were unprepared (compare Goody, 11:1; Hammel and Laslett, 16:1; Plakans, 17:1; Gibbon and Curtin, 20:3, and their debate with Fitzpatrick, 25:2; Breen, 26:2; Adams, 30:3; Tonamura, 32:3; Brettell, 33:3; Urdank, 33:3, and Shepherd, 30:3). These studies require some rethinking, not only of classic assumptions about absolutism and noble revolts or partible inheritance and social mobility but also about the necessity to choose between structural and cultural explanations.

Constructing Local Boundaries. Although their intellectual heritage is quite different, these essays, too, treat issues important to all the social sciences.

The issues they raise, however, are grounded less in ambitions to achieve a science of society than in the distrust of such ambitions, and they focus less on the impact of structural change than on the process of cultural construction. By reading texts closely, they expose the power that builds cultural barriers. Kerwin Klein dissects California travel brochures and the writings of anthropologists, employing a surgical skepticism that shows how much they shared in the distinctions they drew between Native Americans and those of European descent and in the outcomes they expected to result from increased interaction (Sider and Scheper-Hughes, both in 29:1, and Borneman, 30:1, also discuss ethnic classification in America; on descriptions of native cultures in French colonies, see Kelly, 26:3). Decent relativisms, scientific as well as commercial, give way to visions of places that endure and civilizations that are dynamic. Stacy Pigg also emphasizes the importance of place, arguing that the universal language of development marks the village as native and rural and traditional, transforming it in the process. An older literature on local response to calls for development spoke of cultural brokers and a new middle class (for example, Geertz, 2:2; Perlmutter, 10:1, and debate with Halperin, 11:1, 12:1), but the focus here is on a process more general in scope and carried forward in more ordinary activities (compare Rutz, 29:3, and Thomas, 32:1, on that process in Fiji). Absorbed and transmuted at every level, a new vocabulary that creates a politics of difference produces further pressures for change. The implications are enormous, for that sense of difference begins with the disdain of progressives to which peasants around the world have been subjected since Europe began to industrialize.

Locally assembled, using the available materials of ideology and practice, cultural boundaries had to be constantly reconstructed; and Ann Stoler uses the concept of internal frontiers to analyze the complex ways in which this proceeded. There is a large body of theory to build upon (see the discussions by Lewis, 4:2; Benda, 7:3; Brown, 15:4; Wilkie, 19:1; and Bentley, 29:1), and the problems of the transplanted European are especially revealing (compare Cohn, 4:2; and Milone, 9:4; McGillray, 24:2, both on Indonesia). Forced in effect to redefine themselves, colonial officials and Europeans resident in French Indochina and Dutch Indonesia had recourse, as we would expect, to murky ideas of national identity, to theories of race, and to institutions of law and education. In daily practice, however, assumptions about family, gender, childhood, biology, and climate proved equally powerful and more subtly pervasive. As policies were pulled apart by the contradictions they contained, colonial society imposed the cement of middle-class morality and exposed nerves that remained raw in Europe, too (a point treated in Hind, 26:3, and in Stoler's earlier study, 31:1). To look closely at colonial rule, development in Nepal, and the categorization of Native Americans in California is to see the painful power this energetic devotion to defining difference has exercised in the making of the modern world.