

# Book Reviews

## ASIA GENERAL

*The Dissolution of the Colonial Empire.* By FRANZ ANSPRENGER. New York: Routledge: Chapman and Hall, 1989. 336 pp. \$45.00 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper).

The conclusions of this volume by Franz Ansprenger pick up the “lesson of history” found in Karl Marx’s 1853 diagnosis of colonization; the “lesson” of Marx’s groundwork on world uniformization, in fact, becomes the highlight of this study of the dissolution of colonial empires. Let us follow Ansprenger’s process of thought.

Ansprenger’s introduction recalls the motivations and moral justifications of European colonization as well as its economic import. He questions the “dependentist” theories, stressing that, globally speaking, colonial possession has brought little to motherland economies, but that, on the other hand, Western colonization has contributed to “underdeveloping” Africa and Asia.

In the twelve following chapters, the author endeavors to characterize the decolonization process since World War I, reviewing first the colonial tenets and systems of Great Britain and France and also those of the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, and Italy. He views the impact of World Wars I and II on the relationship between the colonizers and colonized in the light of the nascent institutions, movements, and ideologies (right of self-determination, mandate system, pan-Islamism, pan-Africanism, communism). How then, he asks, are we to explain European retreat? Did it hinge on anti-colonial movements, on the growing nationalist tide, on American pressure, or on communist infiltration? Instead of answering his question globally, he chooses to point out that, in the case of Britain, withdrawal was essentially the replacement of a former order by a new form of partnership. Although France had more trouble controlling the withdrawal of its empire, Ansprenger does not consider that French decolonization was a failure. As for the Netherlands and Belgium, he notes that they happened to be more vulnerable to external pressures (in particular by the United States), the former being deeply affected by the “loss” of Indonesia, considered as a defeat. In his final pages, the author gives the background of Portugal’s late expulsion from Africa, assesses the threats of war in southern Africa, and delineates the discussion on the New International Economic Order and the North-South relationship.

Ansprenger’s intent was to cover a broad and intricate “problématique.” With so many studies already written on decolonization, this volume has the advantage of comparative history: differences, specificities, and similarities are brought out by confronting specific experiences and cases. Nonetheless, the author’s concern for comparison could have been pushed to higher limits. He could have given more weight to his analysis by presenting a typology of the pre-colonial and colonial systems and of the takeover modes when independence occurred.

It is unfortunate that the author did not approach his topic with a historiography that enabled him to clarify his positions in the debates that have marked the academic production on decolonization for the last forty years. Since he does not make clear or justify his options, the reader is entitled to ask a few questions. Why does he not deal with the Japanese colonial empire—although, paradoxically, it appears in a specific section of his bibliography? Why in the periodization has he minimized the 1930s and the short but violent 1951–52 recession, which both corresponded with phases of change in the decolonization process? Why has he not assessed the fall of the empires in the light of convergence or opposition between political powers and business groups in the “metropolis”? A mere glance at the bibliography is enough to see how the author shut himself off from such opportunities for analysis. The bibliography has the merit of collating other than English titles but still presents glaring gaps. It is impossible to point out all of them, but here are the most blatant: publications by C. Coquery-Vidrovitch and by J. Marseille on the French colonial empire; by H. Baudet and by H. L. Wesseling on Dutch withdrawal from Indonesia; studies by J. Stengers and by J. P. Peemans on Belgium and the Belgian Congo.

Despite these shortcomings and lacunae that might bother experts, Ansprenger's study is nonetheless useful in that it provides an overview of one of the most prominent phenomena of twentieth-century history.

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*Bouddhismes et sociétés asiatiques: clergés, sociétés et pouvoirs.* Edited by ALAIN FOREST, EIICHI KATO, and LÉON VANDERMEERSCH. Published with the joint support of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the Institute of Asian Cultures of Sophia University. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1990. 206 pp., 16 plates.

Like many volumes emanating from academic symposia on broad topics, this one—comprising papers presented at the second Franco-Japanese seminar on Asian Religions and Societies held in Paris in 1987—is marked by articles of widely varying subject matter and quality.

The pieces range from historical surveys of Buddhism and political power in China and Japan, to studies of the mixing of Buddhism with indigenous beliefs in various cultures, to reports on the present-day situation of Buddhism in parts of Southeast Asia, to a personal autobiographical narrative by a contemporary Japanese Zen monk. Alain Forest, in his introduction, valiantly tries to explain how all this fits together, but even he more or less admits that some of them do not (e.g., Toshihiko Yazawa's paper on Christianity and popular religions in Ming-Qing China, which appears in an appendix). The value of the articles in this volume, then, lies not in their ensemble but in their separateness.

Léon Vandermeersch's “Bouddhisme et pouvoir dans la Chine confucianiste” is little more than a standard review of the various persecutions suffered largely for economic reasons by Buddhism in China, and of the controversies over whether or not monks should pay obeisance to the emperor. The piece is succinct and nicely written, but it breaks no new ground.

In “Les deux roues: le bouddhisme et le pouvoir royal au Japon,” Eiichi Kato attempts a similar survey of Buddhism's relationship to political authority in Japan, but ends up focusing on the Jōdo Shinshū doctrine of ōbō-ihon that stresses the