

## Book Notes

Blackwell.  
*and Violence*, vol. 12.

191-305.  
liche Buchgesellschaft.

no. 3, pp. 335-343.  
Ashley and the Critical

International Affairs.  
*Splittelse og samling*.  
1991). *Regional Great*

Wilson, Dick, 1991. *China's Revolutionary War*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. GBP 20 hb. GBP 8.99 pb. 194 pp.

This is the first book in a series, edited by Justin Wintle, on *Wars of the Modern Era*. It is a good start. Dick Wilson lives up to the aim of the series, presenting a 'concise, clear and authoritative overview' of the military struggles between the Guomindang and Communist forces in China from 1926 to 1949. The book opens with a chronology of key events, followed by biographical notes on 15 main characters. Then, in the introduction, Wilson briefs the reader on Chinese history from 1911 to 1926. Each of the following eight chapters deals with one chronological period, from the first shots in 1926-27 to the final act of 1948-49. In his conclusion, Wilson briefly comments on the paradox that the war's loser, the Guomindang and its national government on Taiwan, has been winning the economic competition with the mainland, thus inducing people to ask whether it was the wrong side that won after all, back in 1949. At that time, the Communists were the 'Mister Cleans' with moral superiority, self-restraint and internal discipline, but that did not lead to welfare and prosperity. It led to Tiananmen. Wilson's book will no doubt be useful as an introductory text for the general reader.

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Todd, Olivier, 1990. *Cruel April: The Fall of Saigon*. (Translated from the French by Stephen Becker.) New York: W. W. Norton, 470 pp.

Vietnam is a long way from the Soviet Union geographically. So even if no communist country to this day has ever ceased to be communist, a hope still remains that communism may be reversible in Vietnam. This is what Olivier Todd wrote on the final page of this anti-communist epos when he first published it in 1987. Three years later, when the English edition appeared, everything was already the opposite way round: Vietnam was to be one of only four remaining communist regimes, three of which are former (and future?) Confucian states. Todd, however, does not think Confucianism makes much difference. 'Like the Berlin wall, the bamboo wall will fall:

the question is not *if* but *when*, . . . Communist systems do not reform themselves,' he says in an added preface to the English version. Todd covered the Vietnam War as a journalist from 1965 to 1973, and has written a vivid, sympathetic account of military and political events during the four months preceding the final defeat of what he sees as a South Vietnamese 'semi-democracy'. Todd tells what happened in all important quarters, north and south, in and out of Vietnam. Furthermore, he adds both facts and flavour by including imagined conversations between disagreeing decision-makers, not only in Saigon and Washington, but even in Hanoi where the leaders 'write poems as fluently as they imprison or execute their enemies'. For a journalistic account, the book seems well researched and imagined, and it reads like a novel.

ST

Betts, Raymond F., 1991. *France and Decolonisation 1900-1960*. London: Macmillan. 152 pp.

Darwin, John 1991. *The End of the British Empire. The Historical Debate*. Oxford: Blackwell, 128 pp.

The breakup of the Soviet Union has renewed the interest in earlier dissolution processes. Most conveniently, new introductions are now available, both to French and British decolonization. Raymond F. Betts's survey is a follow-up to his many earlier publications on the French empire. With the exception of two soberly straightforward chapters on post-WW2 decolonization in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, the book is neither an analytical piece nor a narrative of events, but rather a survey of attitudes, linked to events. The author talks and quotes himself through six decades of imperial history, making many illuminating but not always logically inter-related observations. The book contains far too many misspellings. In 1988, Macmillan published John Darwin's *Britain and Decolonization: the Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World*, presenting the author's own interpretation. Now he follows up with an analytical survey of the historical debate. Three explanatory theories for the British retreat are examined: the 'metropolitan'

theory, the 'superpower' theory and the 'peripheral' theory. While the first locates the causes in British society, and the second in the international system, the third explains decolonization by the rise of nationalism in the colonies. Darwin is tempted to conclude with a combination of the three ('an intellectual Irish stew with a little of everything in uncertain quantities'), but he instead concludes by pointing to the corrosive effects of WW2 as the factor that unleashed the process. Betts and Darwin only briefly touch upon the degree of violence in the French and British retreats. The French exerted far more violence than the British, and London distinguished itself by actually winning its colonial war (Malaya), but then the liberated peoples were sometimes left to fight each other (India). Both Betts and Darwin refer in their conclusion to the ongoing dissolution of the Soviet Union. So far (January 1992), the breakup of the Soviet successor to the Russian empire has been surprisingly peaceful, reminiscent more of the British than of the French model. Is Russian moderation the result of a newly acquired democratic maturity, of a need to concentrate on economic reform, or of the fact that preservation of the empire has been associated with communism? It may be easier to answer this and other questions if we first study earlier experiences of disentanglement. For this purpose, the Betts and Darwin books may serve as introductions.

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Wintle, Justin, 1991. *Romancing Vietnam. Inside the Boat Country*. London: Viking, GBP 16.99. 466 pp.

From 4 October 1989 to 3 January 1990, just as Eastern Europe abandoned communism, the British writer and historian Justin Wintle stayed in Vietnam, a communist country where nothing really spectacular happened. The book under review is Justin Wintle's travel diary. When foreigners are invited to travel in Vietnam, they do it in the almost permanent company of hand-picked guides, interpreters and drivers, who fill the double function of helping the visitor and controlling what he or she does. For the interpreter, the job involves the privilege of contact with the outside world and a chance to travel around in his or her own country. This provides for an ambiguous relationship where the interpreter has a strong personal interest in assuring the satisfaction of the visitor while at the same time preventing anything from happening that might arouse the suspicion of the authorities. Justin Wintle had several good helpers, and came to

know them quite intimately. When publishing their travel reports, most writers instinctively protect their interpreters with silence and a few words of gratitude, the same way you do with close friends. This is a reason why travel reports from closed countries are often impersonal and dull. The only people the traveller really came to know are not described in detail. Wintle's diary is not dull – indeed it is the most faithful and lively portrait of contemporary Vietnam that I have read – but it is indiscreet in that it divulges intimate details about named individuals: their personality, their worries and confidences, as well as Wintle's feelings towards them – well yes, he does not spare himself. Already during the travel, the interpreters must have felt a certain unease about what Mr Justin was up to. Could they not know that he was writing a book about them, their interrelationship with him, and with the people they met on their way? As one of those people, I feel the same unease now, as a reader, but then I must also admire Wintle's directness and openness in presenting exactly what he saw, heard and felt: our meeting with the dissident writer Nguyen Huy Thiep in Hanoi; the discovery of an unknown massacre at Binh Hoa in South Vietnam which took place in December 1966, before My Lai, but which was never reported because the perpetrators were South Korean professionals, not US conscripts; the visit of the tunnels of Cu Chi, that symbol of Spartan inhuman heroic achievement. There is no analysis in this book. The author does not pretend that he knows the answer to any questions. Neither does he romanticize much, not communism, not poverty, not dissidence, not the heroic past, not the beauty of the landscape or the women. Wintle has a sceptic eye, even when examining his own emotions. Wintle's aim has been to do away with Western stereotypes of the soldierly diabolic – or heroic – Vietnamese people by describing them not as a people, but as individual human beings. And yes, in this anti-romantic indiscreet romance, Wintle has indeed de-romanced the-modern tale of Vietnam.

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Dahl, Hans Fredrik, 1991. *Vidkun Quisling. En fører blir til*. Oslo: Aschehoug. NOK 295. 537 pp.

Oddvar K. Høidal, 1989. *Quisling. A Study in Treason*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press. US \$5. 913 pp.

These two most recent biographies of Norway's arch-traitor are at the same time the two most comprehensive to date. Høidal's book is a

political biography. In the early period of Q (1886 to 1945), moves 1930s and his tempest unsuccessful career in tics, to concentrate m Though written by a based on Norwegian p offer revolutionary ne reliable account which research done on the 1980s. Because Høidal the reader necessarily knowledge of Norwegian ditions, his book is part Scandinavian readers. slightly shorter Norwe University Press, 1988). *Vidkun Quisling. En* two volumes, taking its break of World War II academic standards, D popular form than Høid very readable account (though, like Høidal, he scribing the development movement as well). D source material that ha used for research, and is number of minor correcti earlier picture. The book senting a partial 'rehab what it does give is a mo account of the person, pe understanding of the pol ever, it is hardly the def reviews would have us b more sources out there.

Stockwell, John. 1991. *The U.S. Role in the New End Press: Boston, MA. 2*

John Stockwell, the Dir Angola Task Force in 1976. CIA officer ever to expo publicly (cf. *In Search of E* new book he uses his own b critical sweep of Presiden order' strategy. With a sid Administration's need to c from domestic problems w cits, saving and loans scar markets for jobs and rea argues that President Bush g send US troops to the Per