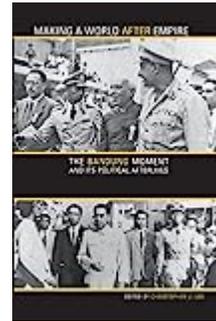




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The Ever-Expanding Ripples of Bandung

In her epilogue to *Making a World after Empire*, Antoinette Burton relates the story of her American Historical Association panel proposal to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Bandung conference. When her proposal reached the program committee, she was informed, "no one on the program committee, save the South Asianist, knew what Bandung was" (p. 352). This shocking lack of awareness about the April 1955 event in Bandung, Indonesia, and its long-lasting impact on the course of African and Asian decolonization and on future relations between the global South stunned Burton. This episode clearly reinforces the need for important works on Bandung and its political afterlives such as those compiled by Christopher J. Lee. As Cold War history narratives are being recentered to recognize Latin America, Africa, and Asia as the places of significant superpower engagement, Lee and his collaborators require diplomatic historians to both remember and address the influence of the Bandung conference on those superpower engagements, especially from the vantage of Afro-Asian interactions separate of superpower relations.

Here in this collection, Lee successfully brings together an impressive array of junior and senior multidisciplinary scholars in a wide-ranging examination of African and Asian interactions in the aftermath of Bandung. The authors attempt to connect the "spirit of Bandung" with large conceptual frameworks and specific case studies that outline the complicated and contested nature of the very spirit itself. While sometimes failing to make clear connections to the locus of Bandung, the essays serve as an important point of departure for historians, diplomatic or otherwise, to begin reincorporating Bandung and the multivariant forces that it represented into the broader discussion of the Cold War and the post-colonial world. Clearly a work that will require significant review by scholars from across the disciplines, Lee's collection begins the process of addressing the shocking lack of awareness revealed by Burton's experience and firmly establishes the need for further comprehensive study of decolonization as it was shaped by Afro-Asian actors along with European imperial powers and Cold War rivalries.

Of the many significant contributions that Lee makes to the collection, including organizing the authors, editing their work, and adding his own scholarship, his most significant contribution is his introduction. Lee manages the difficult task of setting the historical background of Bandung as the jump point for his collaborators as well as the intellectual framework to understand the ripple effects of the event. Lee notes that a concerted effort was made by the participants at Bandung to project solidarity and community. Seeking to avoid romanticizing these visions as Richard Wright did in his *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956), but rather to understand the actual historical developments in Bandung's aftermath, Lee enters into the debates over Benedict Anderson's theory of "imagined communities" and its perceived failures to explain actual developments or alternatives.[1] Out of this conversation, Lee posits that what actually emerged was a "communitas" or "community of feeling" (p. 25). Lee writes that "one can argue that an existential communitas—based on shared experience of Western imperialism—formed an ideological communitas that intended to provide a distinct, even utopian alternative to the preceding era through a discourse of Afro-Asian solidarity" (p. 26). Using "communitas" as a framework to understand the interactions of the many visions and interests of African and Asian participants in both Bandung and its aftermath, Lee asserts that what emerges from the collected work is a discussion of the "tensions of postcoloniality" from the perspective of the Africans and Asians engaged with each other as opposed to former metropolises or current superpowers. By clearly articulating his vision for the collection and framing the debates that it seeks to enter, Lee "presses for a reconfiguration of viewpoint and consequently a reassessment of conventional accounts of the 20th century" (p. 31).

Using Bandung as a radial center for a discussion of social, political, economic, and diplomatic history, the collection is divided into three sections, which attempt to build on each other. The first section frames the questions of anticolonialism, postcoloniality, and globalization. The second group of essays presents a series of case studies that examine the interactions of African and Asian nationalists with a focus on Egyptian and Chinese efforts to influence African decolonization and postcolonial development. The final selections examine the emergence of China in modern Africa and the phenomenon of Osama Bin Laden's image as a catchall for grievances among modern, often marginalized, Africans and Asians facing the challenges of the postcolonial world and the

American war on terror. Burton concludes the work with an engaging epilogue that reemphasizes and reasserts many of Lee's introductory remarks.

While all of the essays in the collection stand on their own in the discussion of decolonization, the development of the postcolonial states of Africa and Asia, and the emergence of a postcolonial community or world order, the influence of Bandung and its aftermath often fails to follow a linear path. At times the essays strike the conference only tangentially. Dipesh Chakrabarty, Michael Adas, and Julian Go outline definitions of "decolonization," the impact of the Great War on the anti-imperial critique, and postcolonial constitutional politics, but they generally fail to engage Bandung directly. Only Chakrabarty directly addresses Bandung and argues that "whatever the meaning of the term imperialism, there was an absolute unanimity among the participants of the conference that they were all opposed to it" (p. 51). Adas argues that the challenge to imperialism strengthens and emerges much earlier out of the collapse of the European narrative of its own civilizing mission during World War One. Go's study of constitutional frameworks for postcolonial societies jumps outside the Bandung structure completely and makes the argument that newly emerging nations borrowed not only from their metropolises, but also from each other as they constructed their new constitutions. In each essay, Lee's concept of "communitas" is developed, but all three essays open the conversation on the antecedents and aftermaths of Bandung without necessarily locating Bandung at the center of the conversation.

The five case studies by Laura Bier, James R. Brennan, G. Thomas Burgess, Jamie Monson, and Lee engage both the spirit and reality of Bandung more effectively. In each of these essays, Lee's "communitas" becomes more clearly defined as variable and filled with the tensions that he describes in his introduction. Whether discussing Egypt's women's press or radio broadcasts to East Africa, China's engagement in East Africa, or the intellectual and physical journeys of African nationalists, all five authors effectively engage the ripples of Bandung as well as inconsistencies in its meaning. The complications of race, gender, class, subclass, culture, religion, and differences in national interests all become apparent in the formation of an Afro-Asian world outside of the colonial or Cold War framework. Each author adds complexity to the broader discussion and highlights the need for all historians, but especially Cold War diplomatic historians, to attempt to understand the intricacies of the Afro-Asian interactions and their shaping of the

postcolonial world that emerged during the Cold War. The diversity of intellectual activity, cultural interaction, political debate, and economic development among and within African and Asian societies must more strongly inform diplomatic historians's understanding of decolonization and the Cold War.

In the final two essays, Dennis Tull and Jeremy Prestholdt take readers into the present day, post-Cold War world to discuss the powerful emergence of China and Bin Laden in Africa and Asia. While certainly engaging discussions about the future relations of Africa and China and the transnational appeal of Bin Laden, both authors fail to aggressively connect either force to Bandung. Rather, it seems that the resonance of Bandung may have faded. Perhaps this explains the broader historical failure to trace the history and resonance of Bandung more fully. Of course, it is at this juncture where the collection is most effective, as a prescription for future work. As Burton writes, "the real challenge that this book throws down is the problem of how Bandung might be positioned as a threshold moment for postcolonial history and what that reorientation might mean for narrating accounts of 20th century racial and sexualized global orders in the process" (p. 359).

Ultimately, Lee has presented an engaging and at times provocative collection of essays that diplomatic historians among others would do well to read and engage. With the study of the decolonization of Africa and Asia gaining momentum, students of American foreign policy must begin to engage scholars from other fields and disciplines and strive to understand historical narratives operating outside the Cold War arena. Then they will better understand the world in which U.S. policymakers operated. Lee and his colleagues present an excellent entry point for this interaction and offer a host of questions and narratives from which to begin what promises to be a fruitful dialogue. For historians who know the influence of the Bandung moment on their own work, this collection will enable them to test their understanding against both theoretical essays and case studies. Indeed, it is clearly the purpose of all the authors both to reignite a conversation that began over half a century ago and to continue to seek an understanding of the immediate as well as the lasting effects of Bandung.

Note

[1]. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

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