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Understanding Politics and History through the Images

Book Review: Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, *Coverage of Political Occurrences in Asia. Pulitzer Prize Winning Articles, Cartoons and Photos*. Berlin–Munster–Wien: LIT Verlag 2015 (pp. 234). ISBN 978–3-643–90592–5. Price: 89.90 EUR.

German political scientist, journalist and historian, Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, has already published sets of Pulitzer Prize winning articles and photos in different domains – including history, media and global politics (see i.e.: Fischer, 1999), conducting his research on the Pulitzer system for over 50 years. Pulitzer Prize committees started to focus on reporting on Asia region before World War 2. Although this region was not in the field of interest of reporters until the Korean War broke out (p.1), the awarded works selected by Fischer seem to be a great contribution to study of the history and political system of Asia.

The aim of the book *Coverage of Political Occurrences in Asia - Pulitzer Prize Winning Articles, Cartoons and Photos* is to present cartoons, articles and photos awarded with the Pulitzer Prize, which depict various aspects of the Asia-Pacific region, starting from the early 1930s. Each chapter begins with a short biographical note about the author and the circumstances under which the text or the photo was created. That is an important advantage of the publication – therefore it is easier to understand the whole background of the papers.

Arranged chronologically, articles cover almost every impactful process or situation in Asia - starting from the Japanese expansion and ending with the conflict in Iraq. Not only do they focus on the political aspects of the region, but also describe social problems, which countries in South-East Asia had to deal with.

The first chapter contains three cartoons made by Harold M. Talburt. They show the danger that the Japanese aggression brought upon the region. The pictures were published for the first time in *Washington Daily News* in 1932, and show the situation in which Japan starts new policy in the region, which finally led to the outbreak of the Pacific War. The cartoons perfectly depict the attitude of global powers – previous allies of Japan – in the time of rising imperialism of this country.

In the next article, Carlos P. Romulo focuses on the geopolitical importance of Singapore in early 1940s. He claims that “Singapore is the key that alone will unlock the door of empire in Asia and Oceania” (p.10) and marks its strategic position for the military perspective during World War 2.

Especially worth mentioning is the chapter devoted to Japanese surrender in 1945, by Homer W. Bigart, who focuses on the role of the American army and its commander - Arthur MacDouglas, the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers. Bigart was the eye-witness of several historical events leading to the Japanese surrender (p.17), therefore his report seems to be extremely beneficial for researchers. The photograph by Joe Rosenthal showing the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima depicts the events of that time, and Bigart’s narration of the battles, destroyed Nagasaki, as well as every detail of signing the Instrument of Surrender and emphasizing the meaning of that particular situation for the future. The pictures of the Instrument – a tangible place of remembrance of Japanese war past (Barbasiewicz, 2016, p.119).

The chapter by Price Day describes difficulties of social and political matters in India. He covered the process of regaining the sovereignty and characterized the phenomenon of Gandhi’s influence. Focused on explaining the importance of the four historical castes and the whole social system in India (p.47), Price Day sums up the uneasy relation between Great Britain and India

Two tragic conflicts are introduced in the next three pieces. The wars in Korea and in Vietnam have had an enormous impact on the countries all around the world. The authors of the articles and cartoons reported the most important moments of the confrontations and their consequences.

What especially attracts the attention is the analysis of R. John Hughes, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the change of the government in Indonesia. That part of the book contains very insightful comments and observations of the author who witnessed the political exchange in Jakarta.

The history of the India-Pakistan war described by Peter R. Kann also appears in this book. The journalist explained the main issue between those two countries and showed both political and social side of this conflict.

The problem of communism in Cambodia covered by Sydney H. Schanberg and the matter of the Indo-Chinese refugees called ‘boat people’ analysed by Henry Kamm

are both interesting and important. The last article about the South-East Asia region focuses on the end of the Marcos system in the Philippines.

One of the best parts of this publication is the chapter dedicated to the Tiananmen massacre. Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have written a very honest and multiperspective piece about some hunger-struck students, the government's reaction and emotions which this difficult situation brought to citizens of Beijing. The authors have showed the people's reflections when they considered those students as a "hope of China" (p. 160)

The last two articles describe the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 90s and the beginning of the 20th century. Even though the authors showed the main problems in this region, one can easily notice that those pieces are not as exhilarating as the previous chapters. It seems like they were chosen only to emphasize the global meaning of those two conflicts.

This publication contains carefully selected articles. It is undoubtedly one of the most profound books covering the history of the journalism focused on the Asia-Pacific region. Rich and diverse bibliography is one of the biggest advantages of this compilation. Not only did the author show the complexity of Asia, but he also pointed out to every meaningful moment of the history. Owing to this fact, it is easier to understand the processes which took place in the 20th century both in the individual countries and in the region as a whole.

The book is definitely worth reading. Those, who has already known the picture of Asia, may find more details in it and those, who have never been interested in that part of the world, will surely discover the beauty of the history and policy of the Asia-Pacific region. It is also strongly recommended to those who teach and study the history of the region. While memorizing certain dates and facts it is also good to have the visible form of the events, that made history.

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