

The Political Process of Decolonization :  
The British Empire and  
“Transfer of Power” in India

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This paper attempts to analyze decolonization in British India. India and Pakistan won their independence through the process of negotiations with the white rulers instead of violently forcing them out; decolonization, as rightly reflected in the word “Transfer of Power,” was a result of a long series of negotiations between the imperial ruling parties and the colonial political elite. The tragedy of “Partition” and the failure of Indian nation-building frequently attracts researchers’ interests. In this paper, however, we will pose the question in another way. With no liberation war nor social revolution, the new states of India and Pakistan *successfully* integrated diverse and wide-spread areas in the sub-continent, while the political system of Great Britain managed to absorb the impact of the loss of India, in sharp contrast to such cases as Vietnam or Algeria under the French administration. How could this be possible, although there was a revolutionary upheaval based on mass struggles? What kind of determinants brought about this result? How did the newly established nation-states differ from the former colonial states?

To answer these questions requires three levels of analysis. First, international society in this period observed the transfer of world hegemony from the European powers to the United States, which definitely narrowed British options in imperial policies. Second, Great

Britain was thrown into the process of transformation from an imperial state to a welfare state, that is to say, a form of capitalism in one country. The full picture of the "Transfer of Power" will be complete only after these two levels, the international level and the changes in the imperial centre, are systematically and logically integrated into what took place in India herself — the third level to be analyzed.

The first section of this paper discusses analytical problems. The second and third sections examine British colonial policies during the interwar period and WWII as the historical preconditions for the "Transfer of Power" in India thereafter.