

counterpart would have very limited knowledge. The precarious role played by Christian missionaries, who had to juggle ecclesiastical and imperial circuits and adapt to the cultural traditions of both East and West, is effectively brought out. However, the constant rhetoric of East versus West that echoes throughout the paper glosses over a lot of grey areas, for instances the role of those missionaries who rose to considerable positions in the imperial courts (e.g., like of Schall).

Overall, the volume will serve the interest of academics and researchers who are engaged in the highly subject specific study of Christian/Jesuit interactions with China. A general critique that can be made of the volume is that it only talks about China meeting Europe and not vice versa. Since there is very little data about whether there was any scientific knowledge transferred from China to Europe or any discussion about the impact that Chinese traditions or knowledge had on Europe, the book can be considered not about European-Chinese scientific exchange (as the subtitle informs the reader) but about the history of European interactions and encounters with the Chinese in the early modern period.

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Nira Wickramasinghe. *Metallic Modern: Everyday Machines in Colonial Sri Lanka*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014. 181 pp. ISBN 978178238-242-3. \$70.00.

Studies on European colonial expansion in Asia have long been predominantly carried out from the perspective of the political centre of authority. Such studies create the impression that European colonialism in Asia largely consisted of economic exploitation, military battles, and bloody killings orchestrated by military elites and selected civilian political actors. As a consequence of this elite and top-down perspective, studies of European colonialism in the rest of the world have tended to overlook the role of the great majority of ordinary people as its main actors. Such studies fail to capture the fact that European colonial expansion also led to changes in the thinking of non-elite groups as a consequence of the introduction of foreign-made non-military machines.

Moving away from the trend of a predominantly top-down viewpoint, *Metallic Modern* looks at the influence of European colonialism in Sri Lanka from the perspective of non-elite groups. It is not the book's intention to discuss late nineteenth and early twentieth century European colonialism in the acrid smell of cannons, guns and grenades. Rather, it examines ordinary Sri Lankan people's meeting with modernity through the consumption and use of foreign-made non-military machinery. The author states that "the aim of this book is to describe how non-elite groups in Sri Lanka encountered modernity most directly through the encounter with machines—among them Singer sewing machines, gramophones, trams, bicycles, and industrial equipment" (2). Wickramasinghe explores how consumers in the Crown colony of Ceylon (i.e., Sri Lanka) used the technological commodities and their desire for such commodities to define their own relationship to modernity. By examining the direct encounter of Sri Lankan commoners with modernity through the consumption and use of foreign machines, the book describes how the idea of "the modern" was nurtured in a British colony in Asia by a changing material world.

The book consists of ten chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. In the eight principal chapters, the author presents “a history at the margins of Sri Lanka becoming modern as its people enter the age of machines” (4). The Sri Lankan encounter with Singer sewing machines is explored extensively in three chapters. Chapter 1 traces the arrival of sewing machines in Sri Lanka. Chapter 2 describes consumers’ acceptance of sewing machines and “the creation of a market imaginary among the growing group of people through advertisements in the local press” (5). Looking closely at the consumption of sewing machines among ordinary people, Chapter 7 recounts their use among tailors and women in the home “to reflect on the limits of modern when confronted with national yearnings” (5).

Ceylon, due especially to its strategic geographical location on the rim of the Indian Ocean, became an important transit port between Arabia, Africa and Europe on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Southeast Asia and the Far East. Like other colonised countries, nineteenth and early twentieth century Ceylon was strongly connected with the outside world. The author examines Ceylon’s meetings with the outside world in Chapters 3 to 5, looking at “various overlapping circles or loops of history, to use a sewing metaphor” (5). She shows how Sri Lankan Buddhists, as a result of new technologies and means of transport, absorbed modernity and felt that they belonged to a larger Buddhist world (Chapter 3), how modern sounds from the gramophone brought about a sense of modernity among ordinary people and Buddhist monks (Chapter 4) and how Japanese modernity echoed all the way to Colombo and other parts of Ceylon. In the remaining chapters, the author narrates Sri Lankans’ encounter with everyday machines such as the bicycle, tram, and car (Chapter 6) and examines the relations between labourers and machines in plantation factories (Chapter 8).

In contrast to the approach to Sri Lankan history that has been dominated by the study of elites, this book, by proposing a different approach to the workings of colonial power from a non-elite perspective, succeeds in encapsulating how a global system, through the influx of technological goods from the British Empire, America and Japan, changed the thoughts and lifestyles of ordinary Sri Lankan people. Though specific local factors also played a role, Sri Lankans’ initial experience actually corresponds to people’s experience in other European colonies in the continent, especially in Indonesia and the Malay world, which have been the focus of my studies of music technology for the last several years.¹ As occurred in Sri Lanka, the “native” encounter with such machines in all these regions brought about socio-cultural and political changes.

Metallic Modern offers insight into the socio-cultural significances of the early consumption of modern everyday machines in late colonial Asia. Though this book depicts in detail the ways that European machines introduced modernity to Sri Lankan commoners, it does not fully satisfy my curiosity about the extent to which such technological devices brought about a socio-cultural reconfiguration at the grassroots level. For example, the book shows clearly how the sewing machine shifted the patterns of Sri Lankan women’s activities in the domestic arena. But to what extent did the bicycle alter people’s daily routines in the public sphere? Like Kees van Dijk’s study on the consumption of bicycles in colonial Indonesia and Malaysia, this book presents a rich account of the influence of bicycles on men but there is not much discussion and no single visual image of how Sri Lankan women related to the bicycle.² I surmise that the

¹ Suryadi, “The ‘Talking Machine’ Comes to the Dutch East Indies: The arrival of Western media technology in Southeast Asia,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 162.2/3 (2006): 269-305.

² Kees van Dijk, “Pedal power in Southeast Asia,” in Jan van der Putten and Mary Kilcline Cody, eds., *Lost Times and Untold Tales from the Malay World* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), 268-282.

bicycle did not engage with the life of Asian women, including in Sri Lanka, until a significant revolution occurred in women's fashion there. It is because the traditional dresses of Asian women, from whatever ethnicities they came from, were not suited to the bicycle, for example the *sari* in Sri Lanka and *kebaya* in the Malay world. One cannot imagine how Sri Lankan and Malay women in traditional clothing can ride a bicycle.

It would be interesting to discuss further how such Western machines influenced traditional gender relations in Sri Lanka in particular and in European colonies in the rest of the world in general. This book also speaks a lot more about Sri Lankan Sinhalese rather than about the Tamil minority community. I found no clear explanation in the book whether this was the case due a paucity of available primary sources dealing with Tamils, a reflection of the political atmosphere of colonial Ceylon that influenced the way European machines were distributed among the island's ethnic groups, or the fact that the colonial authorities tended to discriminate against the Tamil minority and favour the Sinhalese majority. Despite these minor critical comments, I find this a readable and valuable book that provides insights into commoners' encounter with modern consumerism and its complex socio-cultural significance in late colonial Sri Lanka.

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EUROPE & THE WIDER WORLD

Ferry de Goey. *Consuls and the Institutions of Global Capitalism, 1783-1914*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781848933163. £60.

Consuls and the Institutions of Global Capitalism, by business historian Ferry de Goey, continues the series "Perspectives in Economic and Social History" edited by Andrew August and Jari Eloranta. The book opens with a wry anonymous poem collected by Major Joseph Orton Kerbey, the American consul in the Brazilian port of Belém do Pará in the early part of the twentieth century. Consuls, suggests Kerbey, "must know and do everything" (1). As an opener, the poem is both entertaining and insightful, as Ferry de Goey, from Erasmus University in Rotterdam, spends the remainder of the book enlightening his readers on the many facets of consular duties in the long nineteenth century (indicated by the titular dates of 1783-1914). The introduction provides the rationale for the book: that institutional history, important as it is for understanding the rise of economic and political systems as the bulwarks of global capitalism, has somewhat neglected diplomatic history. Within that sub-discipline the neglect of consular history, in de Goey's view, is even more of a significant lapse. Through a series of broad geographical surveys, with individual case studies embedded into the structure of the overview, de Goey sets out to claim a space for the history of consuls, arguing that, "The institution of consuls was indispensable for the development of global capitalism during the nineteenth century" (7).

Before diving into the narrative that covers the Middle East and North Africa, the Far East, North and South America and sub-Saharan Africa, de Goey provides some useful context that complements histories in companion fields such as imperial, maritime and business history.