

The author observes that rural development projects have contributed to the enhanced roles and positions of female farmers. German development approaches at the time, however, were rooted in a growth model of economic development. Technical advisory services were addressed to landowning farmers, who were thus able to increase their income and welfare; whereas this approach side-lined landless people and small landholders. Some respondents critically reflect in retrospect on some problems of project conception and implementation. However, an overall critical analysis of the contribution of German development projects to poverty reduction in India is missing, and the – potentially negative – impact on resource-poor communities is not taken into account. In spite of all development cooperation efforts, India continues to lag behind on key poverty indicators, such as life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality rates, vaccination rates and years of education.

Overall, the book provides valuable insights into 50 years of development cooperation with India and captures multiple voices, often quoted directly. The learning experiences described are still relevant to the debate on the successes, errors and overall validity of development cooperation. However, a critical discussion of a Eurocentric – or even Germany-centric – perspective on development at the end of the book would have been desirable.

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ZOLTÁN BIEDERMANN, *The Portuguese in Sri Lanka and South India. Studies in the History of Diplomacy, Empire and Trade, 1500–1600.* (Maritime Asia, 25). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014. X, 205 pages, €56.00. ISBN 978-3-447-10062-5

The beginnings of the age of globalization – the complex process of increasing economic, political and cultural interaction on a global scale – can be traced back to the 15th century. Despite great geographical distance and a lack of technical innovation (especially in land transport), the colonial expansion of some European empires ushered in political and economic interactions which after a gradual start spread rapidly. When the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama set foot on Indian soil in 1498, he opened up a sea route to India and the neighbouring states for European explorers, traders and missionaries. Over the next few centuries the Estado da Índia, the Portuguese State of India, heavily influenced trade in the Indian Ocean by establishing coastal forts and trading settlements (including Cochin, in India and Colombo, in Sri Lanka). Local politics and religious affairs, especially in the coastal areas, were also affected to some degree by Portuguese or Catholic interests. After the mid-17th century Portuguese dominance in this part of the world was ended by the arrival of Dutch, who were soon followed by English and French, traders and conquerors.

Focusing on this timeframe, *The Portuguese in Sri Lanka and South India* by Zoltán Biedermann (Senior Lecturer in Luso Brazilian Studies, University College London) traces the Portuguese imperial infiltration of India and in particular Sri Lanka over 150 years (1500–1650). From a historical perspective Biedermann emphasizes diplomacy and negotiations as two fundamental initiating and coordinating factors of the Portuguese expansion in Asia. The central idea formulated and illustrated by Biedermann is that the prevailing circumstances such as relative curiosity, impartiality and the existence of perceived parallels concerning general gestures or human behaviour enabled an initial Portuguese-Asian (or more generally a European-Asian) encounter based on processes of negotiation. Imperialistic tendencies, along with expeditions of conquest and sectarian iconoclastic demolitions, are phenomena of a later period (after the mid-16th century).

The book is a collection of partly revised and updated earlier articles and book chapters. The resultant chapters are loosely linked and harmonized with regard to their contents. Biedermann develops his thesis about diplomacy and negotiations in six main chapters, each of which represents “an attempt at innovating without throwing overboard what is most valuable in the existing historiography” (p. 5). The research methodology chosen by the author combines socio-cultural, political and economic approaches and, thus, places Luso-Lankan and Luso-Indian relationships within the transnational as well as the country-specific contexts of the time.

The investigation is based on case studies mostly in Luso-Lankan and less often Luso-Indian relationships and involvements regarding tribute, trade and socio-cultural transformation processes. After an introductory chapter, Biedermann charts significant, multifaceted goals (such as the revival of *Reconquista*, hopes of expanding Christianity and complex mercantile ambitions, p. 10) and factors that regulate the Portuguese hegemonic impulses in Asia. In this context, the author focusses on key contributions of the intercultural and diplomatic competencies and skills of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka as much as the Portuguese office holders to the relatively peaceful start of Portuguese-Sri Lankan interactions (pp. 15ff.). From the mid-16th century onwards the initial Portuguese tendency to favour a politically neutral, trade-oriented relationship with the island’s inhabitants gave way to a new policy of territorial conquest (p. 45). In Chapter Three the author analyses this turn in detail at the local (divergent political systems in Portugal and Sri Lanka) and global (Spanish annexation of Portugal in 1580) levels. In considering the influence of the Habsburg monarchy on the Portuguese Empire (including the process of intensified evangelization, rejection of the anti-conquest policy, and different points of opinion regarding the concept of empire), Biedermann underlines the complexity as well as the transnationality characterizing these socio-political transitions, which were first initiated in Portugal and subsequently in Sri Lanka and South India (p. 58–72).

The fourth chapter illustrates the great benefit of cartographical materials in understanding historical circumstances and developments, such as the aforementioned socio-political transformations in Sri Lanka. In Chapter Five the author considers how the transition to Portuguese colonial rule was shaped not merely by transnational Iberian activities, but also by those of the local, i.e. Sinhalese, elites. These processes were characterized not just by dichotomies of conqueror and conquered. At least elements of the Sinhalese elites capitalized on the transition to colonial rule, using negotiation and diplomatic skills to enhance their privileges and powers (p. 101).

In the sixth chapter Biedermann argues for the importance of port cities as “multi-ethnic melting-po(r)ts” that best reflect socio-cultural transitions. A fundamental understanding of these processes can be achieved by considering the circumstances from various angles: ignoring local impacts and explaining developments in terms of apparently opposing concepts like “Portuguese” versus “Dutch”, “Asian” versus “European” and “Southern” versus “Northern” is a simplification of complex developments. An analytical approach should allow equal room for local, precolonial specifics and for distinct acculturation processes during the colonial era.

In addition to the highly coveted and profitable spices such as cinnamon or pepper, commodities shipped from India and Sri Lanka to various European countries also included elephants. The final chapter “Change and Resilience under Colonial Rule: The Hunting and Trading Elephants in Sri Lanka, 1500–1800” outlines the commodification of elephants as “comparatively rare, but highly valued commodities” (p. 167) over almost the entire colonial period. The edited data based on notes in various travelogues from the colonial period provide an insight into the extraordinary charges associated with the export of such big animals – charges which are in marked contrast to the perceived uselessness of the elephants in the destination countries. This chapter illustrates once again the historical importance of various records such as contemporary maps, travelogues and letters as well as the study of rare commodities like elephants to understand such a complex course of events as Portuguese expansion in Sri Lanka and South India.

All in all, Biedermann offers many valuable insights into the Estado and the Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka and South Asia. Certainly, colonialism involves violence, suppression and exploitation. But an important aspect of Biedermann’s monograph is that it provides a corrective to a homogenizing view of colonial rule. By stressing diplomacy and negotiations as two main factors – albeit practised primarily in the early stage of the colonial period – the reader gains comprehensive and differentiated access to colonial developments. Both the geographic-cultural diversities and the pioneering role of the Portuguese in the Asian context required an approach specifically based on these two factors. Considering the geographic extent and manpower of the Portuguese at this time, this strategy seems to be more than reasonable.

*The Portuguese in Sri Lanka and South India* is a well-written monograph containing a carefully selected body of case studies. It is especially useful for readers familiar with the colonial histories of Portugal, Sri Lanka or South India or interested in using new supplementary sources to study the beginnings of the age of globalization and deepen points of interest.

*Perathiba Mohanathas*

ZHENG YONGNIAN / LYE LIANG FOOK / WILHELM HOFMEISTER (eds), *Parliaments in Asia. Institution Building and Political Development*. (Politics in Asia). London / New York: Routledge, 2014. XX, 297 pages, \$155.00. ISBN 978-0-415-68158-2

This is the second book on parliaments sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, after *Parliaments and Political Change in Asia* by Jürgen Rüländ, Clemens Jürgenmeyer, Michael Nelson and Patrick Ziegenhain (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005; see review by Marco Bünthe in issue 3–4/2010 of this journal). In contrast to the systematic approach of the earlier book, Zheng Yongnian, Lye Liang Fook and Wilhelm Hofmeister opted for a collection of country studies, including Singapore, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, India, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Normally, one expects such a book to start with a systematic introduction, including perhaps a brief outline of a common framework for the country chapters, and end with a conclusion that draws together important issues and identifies differences in the operation of parliaments in the countries covered. A conclusion could also have served to support the initial claim that “parliaments do matter” (p. 5), and to explain in greater depth their contribution to “political development” in Asia (as compared to other factors). Regrettably, this publication includes neither such an introduction nor a concluding chapter.

It seems somewhat odd that the first three country chapters deal with authoritarian countries: Singapore, China and Vietnam. After all, it is worth pondering whether in these countries one can even speak of parliaments in the usual sense since their existence might not be institutionally independent of the respective ruling party. This reviewer was mildly amused by the claim that the “people’s congress system has exercised a more and more important role in promoting political democratization in China” (p. 47). The chapters on China and Vietnam read like formalistic official texts issued by the respective communist parties. Generally, the authors brought together in this book do not seem to have empirical first-hand knowledge of the workings of the parliaments they write about. Moreover, it is not clear what “parliament” is supposed to refer to. Thus, readers are treated to an almost entirely legalistic text about the Philippines. The author on Taiwan dedicates his text to the constituency services offered by