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# **Debating Singapore**

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# **Debating Singapore**

**Reflective essays**

edited by  
*Derek da Cunha*

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## Introduction

Any foreigner who makes return visits to Singapore every few years would attest to the rapidity with which change takes place in the island republic. Indeed, the Singapore of the early 1990s is already a significantly different place from the Singapore of the 1980s. And the difference lies not merely in changing physical landscape, as relentless development turns the last few pockets of rural land into high-rise residential housing estates, but also in the outlook and attitude of Singaporeans. These latter, perhaps more cerebral, changes are given expression in a variety of ways; in politics, ethnic relations, the arts and culture, and through that all-encompassing term, economics, which is particularly close to the hearts of Singaporeans.

With the remarkable speed that change has been effected in these spheres of Singapore life over the last few years, trying to keep track of events and trends and, more significantly, their points of departure, amounts to a daunting task. To that extent, a number of individuals suggested to me the utility of putting together a compilation of essays, written largely by academics, that would chronicle and analyse some of the more salient changes that have taken place in Singapore from the start of the nineties. This book is a direct response to those suggestions.

The essays in this volume are all drawn from the monthly current affairs publication *Trends*, published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and circulated with Singapore's *Business Times* newspaper. (Between September 1990 and February 1992 *Trends* had circulated with the *Straits Times*.)

I have been associated with *Trends* as its Editor since its very inception in September 1990. As a publication devoted to current affairs, *Trends* usually comprises eight essays of a reflective nature, with one or two focused on Singapore. The 31 essays featured in this volume were chosen from the 52 on Singapore drawn from the first 45 issues of *Trends* (up to January 1994).

Readers will immediately notice that all the essays come in bite sizes. This allows for two things — easy digestibility by the reader, and coverage of a large number of topics by no less than 27 authors.

Apart from light editing to make uniform phrasing and jargon, the essays remain essentially in the form they first appeared in *Trends*. So that the reader is aware of this, and the context in which a particular essay was written, the date and issue number in which an essay was published in *Trends* is appended at the end of each essay.

This book makes no pretensions to filling any lacuna in one's knowledge of the rapidly evolving Singapore story. It is essentially intended to provide a slew of snapshots, analysed and dissected by individuals who, with the exception of six, are Singaporeans.

The visitor to Singapore, the academic, the student, and the general reader may all find something of interest within this compact volume. The division of the book into six categories, from politics to economics, with four to six essays in each category, is intended to reflect the key issues that have shaped the discourse on Singapore by scholars and others over the last four years.

*Derek da Cunha*