

de la Perrière's chapter on her research assistant/informant reveals the way in which the divide between ordinary people and those who hold power and influence in Burmese society is bridged by "professional mediators" or *pweza* (p. 71). These aspects of Burmese society are seldom discussed in newspaper articles, human rights reports and scholarly works.

The strength of the book — the inclusion of non-academic writers and academic ones — is also its weakness. The non-academic writers bring personal sentiments and immediacy to the narratives, while the academic writers do an excellent job of foregrounding the personal accounts in wider social, political and economic contexts. However, the styles of writing are necessarily different in tone and context, and thus one experiences a sense of unevenness when going from an academic account to a personal one. However, this in no way detracts from a book that accomplishes its goal of exploring the lives of ordinary Burmese admirably.

Su-Ann Oh

Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119614; email: suannoh@iseas.edu.sg.

DOI: 10.1355/sj30-1p

Remembering the Samsui Women: Migration and Social Memory in Singapore and China. By Kelvin E.Y. Low. Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2014. xii+252pp.

The notion of social memory and the processes of both remembering and forgetting have now become major themes in cultural studies. However, much of this literature remains theoretical and abstract, and relatively little of it addresses issues pertinent to Asia. This volume attempts to address these two concerns through its interrogation of the theoretical literature as a route into the examination of migratory histories, and specifically of the links between China and Singapore as mediated in particular by the experiences of the well-known group of female migrants known as the Samsui women.

These southern Chinese women — who did indeed play a role in the literal construction of Singapore as labourers on building sites in both colonial and post-colonial times — have since been, in a sense, re-invented as pioneers, exemplary workers and figures representing what might be called the “human story” of migration — the uprooting, travelling, adaptation to the initially unfamiliar and difficult life in Singapore, and the settling into a routine of hard labour, often extending into quite old age. The Samsui women have become part of Singapore’s heritage, a term that is now much contested and debated both in scholarly and policy circles, including in the work of such international bodies as UNESCO, whose practice of designating certain historically significant buildings or places as World Heritage Sites is not innocent of a political dimension.

Nowhere is this contestation and debate more acute than in Singapore, where the constant preoccupation of the state to define its identity inevitably involves the selection of memories, exemplary people or groups of people, and sites. The book constantly moves between these levels, utilizing as its master narrative what Low calls “entangled histories” (p. 16). For the co-option of a particular migrant history, in this case that of the Samsui women, involves many elements which the author attempts to identify. These elements include the construction of a “pioneer script” (p. 34) materialized in museum presentations, literature, drama (for both stage and television), the visual arts and the political construction of particular identities and histories embodied in the “nation-building” project that dominated the early years of independence and that continues in various more disguised forms down to the present day. Such policy interventions have been almost totally concerned with the intersecting projects of political control and the definition of national identity throughout independent Singapore’s history. In a country as young as Singapore, these projects inevitably require reference to the past, and, as Low shows in this book, the assimilation of a colonial history — or perhaps better, a history taking place in colonial times — into the contemporary imagination of the nation is an ongoing concern and one that is never definitively “settled”.

The book itself can thus be profitably read as a kind of dialectical movement among various levels: the memories of migrants and the national appropriation of them (or at least of those migrants who have become “heritage” or otherwise politically significant); a re-reading from the perspective of social constructions of the past of the migrant experience as lived by these remarkable and resilient women; the actual ethnography of a rapidly disappearing group of now very elderly people; a deconstruction of the myths and false preconceptions surrounding both the Samsui women and other Chinese female migrants such as the *ma cheh*; the construction of “heritage” by media, state, museums and market (even to the extent of the manufacture and selling of Samsui dolls); the legal, economic and sociological background to female migration from South China; and the politics of heritage in Singapore. The book is rich in theoretical discussion and methodological ideas about the problems of studying memory in a sociological way, and in ethnographic discussion of the migratory experiences and contemporary lives of the Samsui women. Sometimes these issues get in the way of each other, and the reader feels that the Samsui ladies are really just a convenient hook on which to hang what is really a theoretical and methodological discussion. But even if this is the case, Low succeeds in showing the ways in which the co-option of certain (selected) memories have been utilized in the Singaporean nation-building project.

Amongst the volume’s interesting implications are the re-locating of the nation-state not as an isolated entity but as part of much larger transnational processes that include migration, and the juxtaposition of the history and adoption of the Samsui as iconic pioneers with the actual situation of contemporary migrant workers in Singapore — some Chinese, but many Filipina, Bangaldeshi, Thai, Indian or Indonesian. If the Samsui women built Singapore in its earlier incarnations, will these workers also be accorded dignity and recognition for having built the latest version? Will they, too, be incorporated into the national narrative and in a generation also be classified as pioneers? The political edge of Low’s book resides not only in its analysis of the management of memory and forgetting (or

selecting) in the building of the still somewhat fragile Singaporean identity, but also with posing these forward-looking questions on the basis of an examination of the past.

John Clammer

Institute of Advanced Studies, United Nations University, 5-53-70 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-8925, Japan; email: clammer@unu.edu.

DOI: 10.1355/sj30-1q

Innovative Partners: The Rockefeller Foundation and Thailand. By William H. Becker. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2013. 147 pp.

To mark the centenary of its establishment in 1913, the Rockefeller Foundation has published six volumes on its history. Four of them cover, respectively, the foundation's work in the United States, in Africa, in public health and in agriculture. A fifth treats its role as a philanthropic innovator. And the sixth — written by the eminent historian of American business, of economic policy and of the international economy William Becker — focuses on the foundation's work in Thailand, dating to 1915. Each of these volumes is available on the foundation's website, with the volume under review at <http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/uploads/files/29945fef-7950-430d-9892-5767e4066336-innovative.pdf>.

That the Rockefeller Foundation should single out its work in Thailand and with its Thai “partners” through the publication of such a book is in itself worth remarking on. That it chose to do so at a time when rival conceptions of Thailand are the cause of great disharmony makes the decision still more noteworthy, and also rather brave. At the centre of this disharmony is the question of the most appropriate relationship in twenty-first-century Thailand among society, state and the monarchy, whose ties to the foundation this book does so much to celebrate. But the foundation's century of experience with the country and its institutional memory and rich archival record mean that the volume allows for unique insight into