

world. Gay men use the masculine pronoun because they do not want to abrogate their male privilege, whereas *toms* may want to gain access to it. Furthermore, with the slow and general erosion of patriarchy in Asia, there are noticeably fewer *toms* — many of them are androgynous now — proving perhaps that *tom/dee* is a trend embedded in patriarchy.

The book's organizational shortcomings do not distract the reader from the nuanced study of Thai sexualities from a Thai perspective, rather than from dominant Western queer concepts.

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The M Quotient: From Muar to Singapore: Extraordinary Stories of Resilience, Drive and Love. By Lilian Low. Singapore: Write Editions, 2017. xxiii+262 pp.

An intriguing title with skilful and heartfelt storytelling, this book recounts how thirteen talents — including the late President S.R. Nathan and Liu Thai Ker — who either came from Muar or who had spent an important period of their lives in this small town in

Johor (thus the “M Quotient”) helped to build Singapore in both the literary and figurative sense. The M Quotient could equally mean migrant talents. It is a book that documents, for the younger generation, the contributions of these pioneering silent heroes in building a successful city-state since independence.

Muar comes from ‘muara’ in Malay, which means an estuary or the mouth of a river. This analogy is befitting, as many Singaporeans are descendants of immigrants who engaged in riparian living and trading at the Singapore River during Singapore’s early history. In his foreword, Professor Tommy Koh notes that the meritocratic and performance-based system in Singapore welcomes talents, and he “hope[s] that Singaporeans will never become xenophobic and anti-immigrant” (p. iii).

The author’s inspiring opening poem, “Muar Musings”, introduces the thirteen talented personalities. Quite the poet, she also has a closing poem entitled “Serenitas”. Lilian Low’s own story occupies three chapters in part 1. She went to school in Muar, graduated from the University of Malaya and worked in the education sector in Johor Bahru and Singapore. Chapter 4 examines the life of President S.R. Nathan, who was ninety-two years old at the time of his first interview with the author in February 2016. They kept in touch by email until early July 2016. He passed away later that month, and in her book Low pays tribute to his toughness of soul and spirit. Low recounts in the chapter Nathan’s difficult childhood and how he decided to run away from home to Muar.

China-born Liu Kang was one of Singapore’s iconic pioneer artists. He came to Singapore with his soul mate in art, Chen Jen Hao. The two are featured in chapter 5. Chapter 6 is about Liu Kang’s son, Dr Liu Thai Ker. In the chapter, Liu shares his fond memories of Muar and his own quest to be the best, like his father. Indeed, Liu became a top architect, heading both Singapore’s Housing and Development Board and Urban Redevelopment Authority. At the end of the chapter he explains why he did not pursue art as a full-time career like his father. He compared his father’s canvas of one square metre to his of two thousand square kilometres that

had to be artistically filled in architecture. As Lilian Low quipped, “the world is truly his canvas” (p. 104).

Chapter 8 positions Dr Hong Hai as “the quintessential Renaissance man — the man who keeps reinventing himself” (p. 157). Known as Dr Quota, and initially criticized for controlling vehicles with a certificate of entitlement (COE; required to purchase a car in Singapore, which are also highly taxed), he is now vindicated, as the system has been working well for a quarter of a century. From Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Transport and Communication, he moved on to GPC for Health, as the issues it dealt with were closer to his heart. His philosophy of life is enigmatic, and readers are given pause for thought about his views that there are no absolute truths in life, no enduring methods, and that one needs to be humble and live for love above power (p. 157).

The stories behind the various journeys from ‘Kampong Muar’ to Singapore are about more than just opportunities for individuals to do better. As Ralph Stanley, an ear, nose and throat specialist notes in chapter 12, tapping on the proximity of a more advanced city-state allows for upward mobility for all in the region. The various stories and accounts in the book point towards the harnessing of a trinity of what Mr/Ms Migrant knows, whom Mr/Ms Migrant knows and who knows Mr/Ms Migrant. Singapore’s meritocratic formula gains a dynamic multidimensional interpretation in these stories.

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