Las Vegas in Singapore: Violence, Progress and the Crisis of Nationalist Modernity. By Lee Kah-Wee. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019. xvii+275 pp.

This fascinating and unusual book, which combines history, architecture and the politics of post-independence and contemporary Singapore, is an exploration of the status of gambling in the country, from colonial times to the establishment of legal gaming within the confines of the 'Integrated Resorts' at Marina Bay Sands and on the (very slightly) offshore island of Sentosa. The detail is engaging, but the theoretical significance of the book lies in its disentangling of the complex relationships between the control of 'vice', of which gambling was seen as one of the main forms, the colonial and postcolonial state, and what Lee calls "nationalist modernity" (pp. 2–3), of which Singapore stands as an exemplar in the region, and then linking all of these to the unexpected theme of architecture. As such, the book demonstrates a very refreshing perspective on the history and political culture of the country from an angle that few would have considered: the moral ambiguities surrounding the fact that gambling is and was something of a cultural obsession among the majority ethnic Chinese population, and that it was vigorously (with varying degrees of effectiveness) suppressed and outlawed by both the colonial and postcolonial states.

The book proceeds by way of what the author, drawing on Michel Foucault, calls a "critical mode of historiography" problematizing the present by examining moments of crisis (or significant and unexamined events) in order to finally "recognize the fragile foundations upon which the fiction of progress without crisis exists" (p. 5). In the Singapore case, this means the myth of the creation of a modernist state without serious tensions or crises. In fact, history shows this of course to have not been the case: ethnic conflicts, religious tensions, political repression, conflicts over public policy and development plans have been rife. But why approach this 'myth' through the apparently unlikely medium

of gambling? Because, as Lee very effectively demonstrates, the deeply ambiguous attitude of the state to this widespread cultural phenomenon precisely illustrates the fault lines of modernist state-building in Singapore, and in particular the moralistic and didactic political culture of the early years of independence, which has not entirely disappeared. This he traces historically, and much of the historical detail (and comparisons with Macau) is of great interest: the Common Gaming House Ordinance of the colonial period, the policing of vice and in particular gambling, the attempt on the life of the Protector of Chinese, William Pickering, by a secret society member incensed by the former's involvement in a public enquiry into gambling, the post-independence attempt to channel the huge underground economy of gambling into a state-run monopoly in the form of the National Lottery, the toleration of gambling at the Singapore Turf Club, and of course the (contested) decision in 2005 to legalize casino development in the two 'Integrated Resorts' (integrated in the sense of containing extensive retail outlets, play spaces, and food outlets as well as the limited-access casinos). The criminalization of gambling (or its highly restricted forms, the profits from which were supposed to go towards public projects such as the National Stadium) thus miraculously turned into its legalization.

Understanding the large profits that could be obtained from legalized gambling, the state's decision could be taken as simply a rational economic one. Lee suggests otherwise, as he locates this significant shift within a larger model in which while the 'Nationalist Modernity' of Singapore is presented as one without crises, in fact the legalization of gambling represents a window into the moral ambiguities of state-building in the country and their continuing salience: surveillance and censorship have certainly not disappeared, and like gambling, provide avenues into the 'deep' political culture of the country.

This book, spoilt somewhat by the heavy style that veers uncomfortably towards jargon in many places, can be read at a number of levels: as a history of 'vice' in colonial and postcolonial Singapore

and of the many attempts (mostly with mixed success) to suppress it; as an architectural analysis of the process of the conceptualization and creation of the integrated resorts and of the whole largely unknown sub-field of casino design and its spatial theories of how to extract the most profit from gamblers of different categories; and as a fresh rereading of the 'nation-building' process in postcolonial and contemporary Singapore. While its theoretical interest lies in the latter, the historical detail certainly provides a fascinating account of the extent of a 'vice', early policing, the subsequent "normalization of the punitive" (p. 245) in post-independence Singapore and the fact that "ultra-pastoral modernism" (p. 236)—modernity without crisis or dispute—rarely if ever exists, and certainly not in Singapore.

John Clammer

Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat Narela Road, Sonipat, Haryana, NCR of Delhi 131 001, India; email: jrclammer@jgu.edu.in.

Chinese Indonesians in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Democratisation and Ethnic Minorities. By Chong Wu-Ling. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018. ix+244 pp.

Chong Wu-Ling's book is one of the latest additions to the growing number of titles dealing with the Indonesian Chinese in the post-Suharto period. The book was based on her dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology at the National University of Singapore in 2014. It seems though that the book has not been sufficiently updated. It includes the July 2014 Presidential Election (on page 127, about half a page), but not the April 2014 parliamentary and local parliamentary elections.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I (pp. 25–60) covers the history of the ethnic Chinese and the resultant creation of a Chinese "pariah class" (p. 13) in Indonesia. This is followed by a discussion on recent developments of post-Suharto Chinese communities as