sociology and anthropology is good. She states that the situation for anthropology in Singapore is highly promising.

The paper on Borneo deals with a group distributed across three separate nations: the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah took a leading role in setting research agendas and sponsoring field research. There is a rather extensive listing of a range of categories. These include, among other topics, indigenization, minorities, religious conversion, identities and interethnic relations.

The single article on Indonesia states that it is concerned with the self. In fact, there are many ethnographic studies on Indonesian topics but not of this kind. Fundamentalism has become a problem. For good reason there are frequent mentions of Koentjaraningrat, but no mention of the political shifts that resulted in the 'bring culture back' movement.

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Aristocracy of Armed Talent: The Military Elite in Singapore. By Samuel Ling Wei Chan. Singapore: NUS Press, 2019. xxvii+495 pp.

Chan claims that his book "represents the most detailed current account of the military elite in Singapore" (p. 349). Far from being an instance of scholarly hubris, the claim is justified in most respects. The author has undertaken the mission to (partially) unravel the camouflage surrounding the top brass of Singapore's military elite, elucidating the personal motivations, circumstances and structures that have defined their careers.

In the first chapter, Chan clarifies what he understands by the term 'military elite'. His primary concern is the career trajectories of 'flag officers', the highest echelon of the three services in the

Singapore Armed Forces (SAF); these officers wear the rank of brigadier-general (BG), its equivalents, or higher. He also engages with relevant scholars studying militaries, like Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz, and provides an overview of the academic literature on the SAF. Chan, like other scholars writing on the SAF, continues to face an uphill battle because of the paucity of declassified state documents. Nevertheless, by deploying empirical data from an arsenal of sources such as interviews, newspapers and other material published by the SAF's publicity arm, one cannot help but be impressed by the scholarly dedication of the author. Furthermore, the appendix contains meticulous records that will be helpful for future scholars writing about Singapore's defence and security and the SAF.

Chan provides a brief overview of Singapore's historical experience in setting up a professional military following independence. Chapter 2 affirms the dilemmas faced by Singapore's pioneer leaders in their attempts to convince the citizenry of the importance of defence and conscription through National Service (NS). The author convincingly recounts the obstacles in setting up a military during Singapore's early years as a nation-state, establishing a contextual base for subsequent chapters.

Chapters 3 and 4, meanwhile, are heavily based on the retrospective accounts of twenty-eight interviewees, all of whom are retired generals and admirals. These two chapters are probably the most enlightening parts of the book, yet the quality of scholarly inquiry plummets from here on. Both chapters humanize these elusive figures of authority who once commanded generations of men and women in uniform—institutions, after all, are made up of actual persons. For such an organization as the SAF—where power distance, hierarchy and narratives of patriotism are distinctive elements of its culture—Chan has managed to sieve out the more individualistic reasons that went into the decisions of these men to 'sign on'. They stem from human concerns: ambition, self-improvement and hope for a better life. His treatment of the sources, however, is largely problematic. Besides pointing out the dimension of "rhetoric

of modesty" and the vetting of his transcripts (pp. 24–25), Chan explicitly chose to de-emphasize the strongest aspects of these accounts: the human relationships and personal characters of his interviewees. These ingredients, if they had been included, would have tremendously enhanced his work. Chan himself makes the observation in the final paragraph of the book that "[t]he candid lived realities captured in this volume reveal frailties that made military elites human" (p. 361). Why exorcise the humanity from accounts that are inherently human? Furthermore, even though the author declares the enlistment and retirement dates of the interviewees (some serving decades apart from one another), using these interviews collectively and drawing broad conclusions from them unsurprisingly result in an unnuanced analysis.

Chapters 5 and 6 report on the promotion mechanism and structure of the military hierarchy, with the former also drawing upon the interviews. One does wonder why Chan made the decision to place these two chapters after chapters 3 and 4. A reversal of this order would have been more strategic as familiarity with the structure of the SAF would provide a more effective reading of the excerpts from the interviews. The overall outcome is a clumsy narrative, not to mention the frustrating need to retreat constantly to the twelve-paged abbreviations table to get through a text generously littered with acronyms.

In chapter 7, Chan aims to provide an examination of the profiles and trends with regard to flag officers. His findings blatantly point to a preference for elite school graduates being granted the most prestigious scholarships of the SAF. Chan avoids a comprehensive scrutiny of this trend, even amid contemporary debates on elitism and inequality in Singapore. In the penultimate chapter, he attempts to identify future challenges for the SAF by briefly outlining challenges faced by contemporary Singapore society, like the crisis in meritocracy, an ageing population, and the cult of gross materialism. If one manages to overlook the author's distinct invocation of nostalgia, there remains a pertinent point that the SAF should continue to adapt in order to meet the future defence needs of Singapore.

While Chan's work deserves credit for filling a gaping hole in the academic frontline, his book in its entirety reads more like a long apology letter on behalf of the SAF. At times, conciliatory moments strike the reader by surprise, or perhaps more appropriately, from ambush. One simply needs to look at three of many fleeting instances: first, Chan's reproduction of government statements, reiterating tired and worn-out tropes concerning Malay participation in NS and the SAF (pp. 16–17); next, his defence of 'meritocracy' through his cavalier dismissal of often-heard complaints from servicemen (p. 146); finally, his apologetic treatment towards Goh Keng Swee's management of SAF promotions (pp. 196–98). Chan further misses a shot at adequately contextualizing Singapore's militarized sociopolitical landscape with some bearing to its Southeast Asian neighbours, perpetuating nationalistic exceptionalism. Indeed, what is clearly 'missing in action' from the book is scholarly inquiry about his sources, making the monograph a tragic casualty of the shortfall in intellectual scepticism.

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Singapore's Multiracialism: Evolving Diversity. By Chan Heng Chee and Sharon Siddique with Irna Nurlina Masron and Dominic Cooray. London: Routledge, 2019. xvi+297 pp.

The multicultural quality of Singapore society has always been one of its outstanding characteristics; indeed, perhaps its main one. A great deal of scholarly ink and political discussion has been expended on discussing, worrying about and attempting to manage this diversity and the potential problems—especially of inter-ethnic conflict—that it poses, in what is furthermore a very small and densely settled country, but also one deeply integrated into the global economy, with