

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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DOI: 10.1355/sj35-2k

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

the attendant social and cultural pressures that this brings. This book is a detailed account of the origins and evolution of this diversity, and a detailed discussion, albeit rather speculative, of probable or possible future trends. Read as the former, it is a fairly comprehensive guide to the literature on Singapore's multiculturalism, and read as the latter, as a projection, based both on the literature and on extensive focus group and individual discussions with a range of Singapore citizens and long-term residents. Hitherto, much of the discussion of Singapore's sociology has been built around the 'CIMO' model—the idea that the country is basically made up of four main ethnic groups, the Chinese, Indian, Malay and 'Others', the latter comprising a heterogeneous mix of Filipinos, Arabs, Indonesians, Europeans, Eurasians and stray others. A great deal of social policy and political energy has been devoted to managing this situation and ensuring as far as possible convivial and frictionless relations between the four groups.

However, the relative stability of this situation, largely in place since independence in 1965 and even before, has been disturbed by many emerging factors. These include both in-migration, discussed in detail here, and out-migration, unfortunately given little attention in this book, which is a pity precisely because it is an indicator of the perceived stresses of the CIMO model, particularly among the 'Others' such as Eurasians, Jews, Peranakan Chinese and to some extent Indians. But other subtler factors are also in play—including changing perceptions of the significance of ethnicity as a marker of identity among younger Singaporeans, the ageing of the society (to some extent offset by in-migration), exposure to global cultures, and the spread, or now rooting, of diverse religions in a very spatially small society. The entire economy of Singapore is dependent on its integration into the global economy, and with it, travel, tourism—both in- and outbound—education and the presence in the country of highly internationalized universities and art schools. The very high Internet connectivity in Singapore shows clearly the porousness of its boundaries. Partly through its emphasis methodologically on "grounded theory" and the manifestation of this in the focus

group data collected, the book does show the changing attitudes of Singaporeans to the factors that influence their identity, both positive and negative—a weakening sense of racial differences, high rates of interethnic marriage, religion, and a growing sense of belonging simply as an effect of the passing years since independence, balanced by more negative ones such as resentment at the high number of foreigners now living in the country and the fear that this will take away jobs, drive up property prices and make inter-group communication difficult because of language and cultural differences. The book is rich on data on all these factors and more, and through the “personas” (the fictional figures of varying ages and ethnicities) with which the book concludes, presents a range of possible futures based on the evidence collected from the focus group discussions.

There are also some areas in which I think that the discussion in this rich and highly documented book could have been deepened. It is weak on the theorization of the key idea of multiculturalism, identifying it essentially simply with the multiracial CIMO model, whereas in fact this is a highly contested concept. Another vital missing area is that of class. The authors sidestep this by noting that it would take another study, although there is evidence of considerable social inequality in Singapore. The fact that a rich *towkay* (wealthy ethnic Chinese businessman) is just as comfortable eating the same hawker food as any average citizen (p. 139) hardly exhausts this major issue. Economic inequalities among the four major groups are passed over in silence. This perhaps reflects the fact that the book does not really engage with the political culture of Singapore—the essential context for any discussion of identity—and the extent to which it has been very heavily managed since independence. The authors do have the courage to raise the issue of the infamous ‘Marxist Conspiracy’, but do not draw any larger conclusions from it. The final point may seem small, but I think it is not: it is notable that this book on multiculturalism never once discusses *culture*, except through the proxies of religion and ethnicity. In fact, cultural production, and the censorship which it has in the past often attracted, is a vital and here totally unexplored area that would have provided

essential clues to what might be called ‘deep multiculturalism’ in Singapore. What do people actually do, consume, produce, negotiate, reject or prefer in terms of their cultural activities? This, alas, we do not discover here. But this is clearly an area that needs much more in-depth discussion in order to fully grasp Singapore’s multicultural identity and its probable evolution.

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DOI: 10.1355/sj35-21

Engaging Asia: Essays on Laos and Beyond in Honour of Martin Stuart-Fox. Edited by Desley Goldston. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019. xxiv+478 pp.

Engaging Asia, a festschrift to honour Emeritus Professor Martin Stuart-Fox, is a collection of eighteen works; twelve are fragments of the discontinuous history of Laos that Stuart-Fox devoted much of his career to clarify. He retired in 2005 as Head of the History Department of the University of Queensland, where he was educated from start to finish. As an undergraduate, he majored in evolutionary biology—this is foundational in the sense that Darwinian principles have coloured his thoughts about history and cultural evolution for decades. Spanish philosopher Juan Ramón Álvarez discovered his writings on cultural evolution only in 2015 and liberally quotes him in the penultimate chapter, “Biological and Cultural Evolution”. Robert Bucknell, a classmate whom Stuart-Fox collaborated with on several publications on Buddhism, continues their disputations in “What is the First *jhāna*? The Central Question in Buddhist Meditation”.

One of Stuart-Fox’s early doctoral students, Souneth Photisane, writes of the obstacles that for years have stood in the way of publishing a government-sanctioned ancient history of Laos in his chapter, “On Writing Volume One of *The History of Laos*”. Premier