at a time of aggression by non-Buddhists. Arguably, this explains why Mandalay retained its status as the sacred heartland of Burma to this day.

Overall, the book is a textured and meticulous work of passion that deserves to be read by anyone interested in Southeast Asia's cultural, religious and urban history. It is also a valuable reminder that Burma can be apprehended and appreciated for its cultural and historical richness beyond the horrors faced by its people today.

Jérémie Sanchez
Haute École pédagogique Fribourg, Rue de Morat 36, 1700 Fribourg CH, Switzerland; email: jeremie.sanchez@hotmail.com.

DOI: 10.1355/sj37-3j

The Shop on High Street: At Home with Petite Capitalism. By Souchou Yao. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 177 pp.

Although the centrepiece of Souchou Yao's book is his family's shophouse on High Street in Kuala Lumpur, he separated 'shop' from 'house' in his book and chapter titles to afford himself some analytical distance. As noted in his preface, an autoethnography about his childhood home and himself might seem self-indulgent or overwrought with unsolicited emotions. Why should the plight of his family be published as an academic monograph? He answers this question aptly through an engaging story that simultaneously reveals the intimate life of the shophouse as both home and business and critiques the cultural constructs that have enabled this kind of family business to continue despite their emotional and financial costs.

As the author of *Confucian Capitalism* (2002), Yao further deconstructs the myth of the Chinese entrepreneur through a personal story that reveals how Confucian ethics and dedication towards family are lived values, but upholding these values requires some self-deception, compromise and "promiscuous optimism" (p. 137), which enables family members to endure. Framing his

book around the concept of 'Chinese petite capitalism'—defined in chapter 1—Yao illustrates how his immediate and fictive family members manoeuvre within its strong constraints by continually renegotiating the ambiguous boundaries between "capital and labor, cooperation and exploitation, family and economy, tradition and modernity, friends and competitors" (p. 5).

In chapter 2, Yao recounts the colonial origins of shophouses in Southeast Asia and their shifting status from modest mixed-use buildings, as obstacles to urban development, and finally to darlings of architectural heritage and tourism. For the Yao family, the shophouse was a home full of memories laid down through domestic rituals and worship, interpersonal negotiations and business transactions, all within the confines of an architecture that did not allow for the separation of home and work life, since "virtue was homebound and involved devotion to work—as endorsed by the gods and ancestors" (p. 36).

In chapters 3 and 4, Yao focuses on relationships: fictive, entangled and intimate. In chapter 3, he recalls his father imparting the notion that fellow Hakka people—regardless of consanguinity or affinal ties—are all kin who must be treated with deference even if respect was sometimes performed rather than felt. "Hakka kinship practices are a form of rediscovery, a way of putting social relatedness to a firmer ground of intimacy" (p. 49) that could be called upon to smoothen hard-nosed economic calculations and sustain "the Hakka way of doing things" (p. 54). Analysing the fate of his mother and sisters, in chapter 4, Yao observes how despite his father's love and good intentions the women in his family were marginalized and treated as "a source of power, wealth, and social superiority for Chinese men" (p. 77) rather than as manifestations of their own agency. Yao's intimate knowledge of Hakka home life enables him to present a nuanced critique wherein the "complex social arrangement [of Chinese petite capitalism] gives women their due in all kinds of ways, even as it disparages their poor decision-making and other weaknesses" (p. 78). His mother and sister were recognized as integral parts of the family but were not free to make independent

decisions, particularly with regard to the family business. In his words, "[p]atriarchy is not undone, but moderated" (p. 78).

In chapter 5, Yao analyses the power relations between the labourers—young men from fellow Hakka families who are taken in as family and trained to become future petite capitalists—and the boss and his family. In doing so, he highlights how the shophouse "was more interestingly a social order" (p. 89) that promoted the myth that anyone could become the boss of his own shophouse, although in practice only few managed to succeed.

Chapter 6 focuses on Malaysia's national education system and how Chinese petite capitalist families invest in their children's education as a means of securing a better future. Chapter 7 discusses indebtedness and how petite capitalists like Yao's father can never escape its heavy burden. For, unlike David Graeber's analysis where the human economy is a corrective to capitalism's excesses, Chinese "guanxi economy is conservative and avoids world-changing agendas" (p. 121). Yao's father believed that "financial dealings among friends must be honourable", but he also believed that "competition and altruism can be harmonized, their contradictions smoothed over" (p. 121). In the case of Chinese petite capitalists, both the borrower and the lender were judged based on their sincerity, reputation, and financial position (p. 124). This comparison of Graeber's anti-capitalist analysis of debt with the relational but inherently capitalistic practices of Chinese entrepreneurs is a significant insight that should serve future studies of different Chinese societies.

In the final two chapters, Yao recounts how the entrepreneurial spirit pushed his father to overextend his business, which likely contributed to the latter's ill health, and led to bankruptcy. Yao's father left a difficult, sullied legacy for the family; but in the end, Souchou Yao is measured in his assessment of the petite capitalist dream. He sees how his upbringing in the shophouse on High Street enabled him to build a sense of self-worth and independence as a young student in Australia, and how there was a sense of dignity in "the petite capitalist's need to work for oneself" (p. 172).

In the field of Overseas Chinese Studies, it is rare to have such a personal but theoretically informed account that sheds light on both the intimate life of family dynamics and the public life of nation-building. This in-depth case study of one shophouse owned by a Malaysian Hakka Chinese family could breathe new life in this sub-field of specialization by legitimizing similar autoethnographic studies.

Jayde Lin Roberts
School of Built Environment, Red Centre Building, West Wing, Room 2020, UNSW Sydney, New South Wales, 2052, Australia; email: j.roberts@unsw.edu.au.

DOI: 10.1355/sj37-3k

Conceptualizing the Malay World: Colonialism and Pan-Malay Identity in Malaya. By Naoki Soda. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2020. xix+206 pp.

Soda's *Conceptualizing the Malay World* is the first book-length effort in Malaysian studies to analyse the construction of the modern Malay world through the lens of colonial knowledge (pp. 1–4) as expounded by Cohn and applied by anthropologists and sociologists to the Malaysian context. But it would have been helpful if he had discussed what 'colonial knowledge' is and its difference from 'colonial discourse' to avoid the term colonial knowledge coined by Cohn. The following paragraphs should be helpful in distinguishing between the two.

Discourse on the impact of colonialism in Malaysia's historiography has been extensive both in academic as well as non-academic writing. But 'colonial knowledge' as a concept—introduced and discussed in-depth by anthropologist-historian Bernard Cohn in his thirty-year empirically grounded study of British colonialism in India (1987, 1996)—is almost absent or unknown in Malaysia's historiography or in discourse on Southeast Asian history (Norman 2014). Various scholars, however, have used this term that Cohn coined in its literal sense.