Religious Diversity in Singapore

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Religious Diversity in Singapore

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FOREWORD

The world is experiencing growing religious pluralism amidst rapid globalization. Religious pluralism has two faces: it can promise peace and harmony through mutual tolerance and understanding, but it can also pose challenges to social cohesion. Recent global and regional events and developments have shown how religion can be misused and misinterpreted to cause conflict among countries and peoples, be it through military intervention or incendiary words and actions of zealots. Yet, all religions teach love of humankind, peace and harmony, and share the same golden rules to treat others as one would like to be treated himself and forgive those who have wronged us. Such common religious teachings are now being actively harnessed to nurture harmonious personal and group behaviour for the larger common good of society.

Singapore has long been an example of religious pluralism. Our largely religious population adheres to the tenets of various faiths and an extensive range of religious traditions, customs, expressions and organizations. This overlaps with an equally impressive range of ethnic and cultural diversity. Adding yet another layer to this diversity is the Singapore state which is strongly secular in its administration and yet fully supportive of freedoms to adhere to one's faith. The state also engages with the different religious groups for the purpose of nation-building. I believe that Singapore's experience of religious pluralism, its record of peaceful inter-religious relations and its management of mutual religious recognition could be a useful reference as we deal with the challenges that are apt to influence our society from the growing impact of religious practices and preachings from around the world.

This book is the result of extensive research and a rare collaboration that cuts across religions, disciplines and interests. Its collection of reflective essays provides a range of information, illustrations and insights of Singapore's religious landscape, discusses candidly specific religious issues and

developments, and offers suggestions for managing them. It will help to address, to a certain extent, the concern about the need for understanding both the intra-religious and inter-religious tensions that surround us.

I would like to congratulate IPS, especially Dr Lai Ah Eng, the editor of this book, for taking the initiative to address a difficult subject and delivering a seminal volume.

S.R. Nathan
President
Republic of Singapore

PREFACE

This book is the outcome of a three-year research project led by my colleague, Dr Lai Ah Eng. The project's objectives were threefold: to identify key trends and issues pertaining to religious harmony in Singapore; to offer insights and suggestions to policy-makers; and to contribute to inter-religious understanding and harmony. These objectives are also consistent with IPS' mission of undertaking strategic policy research and of building bridges among our diverse communities and stakeholders.

It is never easy to undertake research on religion because of the potential sensitivities. It becomes all the more difficult when we study religion at a time when it has been politicized and hijacked by violent groups to further their political agendas. But, for that very reason, this book is both timely and significant. The attention to religious revivalism, ethno-religious issues, inter-religious interaction and intra-religious divisions further adds to the book's importance.

Given the challenging nature of the project, it was necessarily a long and arduous journey and it required the collective effort of many good people. Among them were academics, religious practitioners and graduate students from a range of disciplines and backgrounds. Without their diligence, commitment, objectivity and courage, this book would not have been possible.

On behalf of IPS, I would like to thank each and every one of the contributors to this book. IPS is also indebted to President S.R. Nathan who so kindly agreed to write the Foreword to this book.

I should also record our deep appreciation of Singapore Pools (Private) Limited for sponsoring the entire project.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Ah Eng for adding one more seminal volume to Singapore's growing literature on religion and ethnicity.

Professor Tommy Koh
Chairman
IPS Management Board

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the outcome of a research project titled Religious Diversity in Singapore that was conducted between January 2004 and December 2006 by the Institute of Policy Studies. Many people and processes were involved in this huge research and book project.

A conceptual brainstorming session with invited religious and civil society representatives, academics and interested individual citizens was first conducted in February 2004, followed by a workshop on 1–2 September 2005 during which thirty research papers were discussed. This book comprises revised versions of most of the workshop papers. The chapter writers themselves comprise both individuals who responded to the call for participation and those invited to undertake specific topics within their areas of research and expertise.

Throughout the project, the availability of participants and coordination of their work to match the project's requirements was a constant problem. At times the coordination became a weary nightmare, but this was made up for by many participants who were dream teams to work with. Overall, the many opportunities to discuss with individuals who were highly committed to the project and appreciative of understanding religious diversity in Singapore always served as a reminder that the project was worthwhile.

There are many people as well as organizations to thank for many reasons in this project. I would first like to thank the Singapore Pools (Private) Limited for sponsoring the entire project. The participants of the conceptual brainstorming session are to be thanked for speaking freely and frankly and for their many suggestions and moral support. Equally heartfelt thanks are due to those who gave permission to researchers to access their organizations for surveys, interviews and observations, and to those who responded. The participants at the project's workshop must also be thanked for their comments and suggestions on the papers presented. The project benefited much by way

of the papers' analyses and recommendations being subject to their public and professional scrutiny.

My colleagues at IPS are gratefully acknowledged: the Institute's chairman Professor Tommy Koh and deputy director Mr Arun Mahizhnan for their support and encouragement; Dr Gillian Koh, IPS' publications coordinator, for working with the publisher, ISEAS, on contractual details; Ms Irene Lim and Ms Claris Wang for their tremendously helpful and efficient administration of the project; and Ms Kartini Saparudin without whose technical and filing assistance I simply could not have managed.

Many others helped to make this book's publication possible. I thank the many readers of the individual chapters for their useful comments. Ms Rahilah Yusuf of ISEAS Publishing is gratefully thanked for her copy-editing role and handling production of this book. I would also like to thank the Asia Research Institute, my current place of employment, for allowing me the time to work on the last stages of the manuscript.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the book's contributors as well as their research assistants. One of my main concerns in this project was finding enough researchers for various topics. While it was true that I could not find a suitable participant each time I started on a search, it also always did turn out that I would eventually meet someone who would help with a suggested name or two, which I would follow up on, with the end result unfailingly being a secured contributor. Such good luck, good support and, as one participant saw it, "the good God's grace and guidance" not only led the project to receive a bumper crop of contributions at the end of the long haul, but also to each one being undertaken with much care, concern and commitment.

Once again, I thank all for their goodness, grace and guidance in making this book possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

4PM	Malay Youth Literary Association
ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam
AEF	Asia Evangelistic Fellowship
AMLA	Administration of Muslim Law Act
AMD	Advance Medical Directive
AMP	Association of Muslim Professionals
ARI	Asia Research Institute
BAPA	Religious and Educational League of Radin Mas
Bawaean Putra	Speak Takraw Club
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CDAC	Chinese Development Assistance Council
CDC	Community Development Council
CME	Civics and Moral Education
CNN	Cable News Network
CSGB	Central Sikh Gurdwara Board
Darul Arqam	Muslim Converts Association
DRH	Declaration of Religious Harmony
FCBC	Faith Community Baptist Church
FEBA	Far East Broadcasting Associates
FGCBF	Full Gospel Christian Businessman Fellowship
FSC	Family Service Centre
HBI	Himpunan Belia Islam
HDB	Housing Development Board
HEB	Hindu Endowments Board
IAIN	Institut Agama Islam Negeri
ICCI	Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel
IDSS	Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
IIIT	International Institute of Islamic Thought

IIUM	International Islamic University Malaysia
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies
IRCC	Inter-Racial Confidence Circles
IRO	Inter-Religious Organization
ISA	Internal Security Act
ISEAS	Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
ISKON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
ISTAC	International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization
ITE	Institute of Technical Education
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
LBKM	Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Memorial Scholarship Fund Board
LMS	London Missionary Society
Majlis Pusat	Central Council of Malay Cultural Organizations Singapore
MCS	Medical Counselling Service
MCS-SANA	Muslim Counselling Service of the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association
MCYS	Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports
Mendaki	Council for the Development of Muslim Community
MINDEF	Ministry of Defence
MMO	Malay-Muslim organization
MND	Ministry of National Development
MOE	Ministry of Education
MRHA	Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act
MTFA	Muslim Trust Fund Association
MUIS	Islamic Religious Council of Singapore
MWA	Metta Welfare Association
NCCS	National Council of Churches in Singapore
NCSS	National Council of Social Services
NFP	not-for-profit organization
NE	National Education
NGO	non-government organization
NKF	National Kidney Foundation
NRM	New Religious Movements
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama
NUS	National University of Singapore
NVPC	National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre
NYC	National Youth Council

OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship
PA	People's Association
PCMR	Presidential Council of Minority Rights
PERDAUS	Adult Religious Students' Association
PERGAS	Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers Association
PERKAMUS	Literary Association
PLU	People Like Us
PPIS	Young Women Muslim Association
RE	Religious Education
RIMA	Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs
RK	Religious Knowledge
RME	Religious Moral Education
ROS	Registries of Societies
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
SAFF-PERDAUS	Youth Wing of PERDAUS
SBF	Singapore Buddhists Federation
SCEM	Singapore Centre for Evangelism and Mission
SCTA	Singapore Ceylon Tamils' Association
SDU	Social Development Unit
SE	Spiritual Education
SGPC	Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee
SINDA	Singapore Indian Development Association
SIP	Singapore Internet Project
SKML	Singapore Kadayanallur Muslim League
SMTUK	SMT Uthavum Karangal (Helping Hands)
SNHA	Singapore National Heart Foundation (formerly SHF, Singapore Heart Foundation)
Sriwana	Malay cultural dance group
SSA	Singapore Soka Association
SSCOS	Sathya Sai Central Organization of Singapore
STMWS	Singapore Tenkasi Muslim Welfare Society
Taman Bacaan	Singapore Malay Youth Association
VWO	voluntary welfare organization
YSA	Young Sikh Association

GLOSSARY

adi	original
aghawat	chieftains
ahli sunna wa'al jama'a	people of the approved way (with reference to the early theologians)
*ajaran sesat/songs*ang	deviation
akal	reason
al-Fatihah	a prayer taken from the opening chapter of the Qur'an
amal maaruf nahi mungkar	forbidding evil and enjoining good
amrit	baptism ceremony
aqidah	belief, faith, creed
arathi	camphor flame
arccanai	offering
ardas	prayer, supplication to God
asatizah	religious teachers
ashram	hermitage
asuras	demons
at-tasawwuf	science of sufism
Baha'ullah	glory of God
Bai shen	praying to the gods
Baisakhi	Birth of Khalsa
baitulmal	common fund
Bani	Scripture
bhajan	devotional hymns
bhakti	devotional
ceramah	public talk
chura	a low caste similar to Mazhabi
dakwah	endeavours to make Muslims better Muslims

	or to spread the message of Islam to non-Muslims
dana	transfer of property according to sastric or classical text rites so as to reach a fit recipient
dar al-Harb	abode of war
dar al-Islam	abode of peace
dar al-Sulh/dar al-'Ahd	abode of treaty
darurat	state of temporary suspension/postponement for the implementation of *syariah*
dharma	Buddhist teaching (Way of Higher Truth)
dhimmi	protected status of non-Muslims residents in an Islamic state
dianah	religion
Diwali	Festival of Lights, celebrating the victory of good over evil
dukkha	suffering
Dussehra	festival that celebrates the victory of Durga over Mahisa Asura
fa-ming	religious name
fardhu ain	compulsory rituals and theology that must be learned and practised
fatwa	religious opinion/legal opinion
fiqh	Islamic jurisprudence
fitrah	nature
giani	priest
gotong royong	mutual help
gurdwara	Sikh place of worship
Gurmukhi	script the Sikh scriptures are written in
guru	spiritual teacher or head of a religious sect
guru bhakti	devotion to a spiritual master
hadith	traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad
hafiz	one who memorizes the Qur'an
haj	pilgrimage
halal	permissible according to Islamic law
haram	prohibited according to Islamic law
hijab	veil or headcover worn by Muslim women
Holi	a one-day spring festival with the practice of throwing coloured water

homam	act of making an oblation or burnt offering to the gods by throwing ghee into a sacrificial fire
hudud	penal code of the Islamic law
ibadah	worship
ijtihad	the use of one's independent reasoning and legal judgement on a point of law not explicitly covered by the Qur'an or the *sunna*
ilmu sifat	knowledge on the attributes of God
jat	caste title for those who were land owning farmers with a strong military tradition
jemaah	community of believers
kach	shorts, one of the five emblems of the Sikh
kanga	comb, one of the five emblems of the Sikh
karma	action, ritual act or religious observance
Kaur	suffix to Sikh female names, meaning princess
kavadi	burdens; it is also a portable altar decorated with peacock feathers and attached to the devotee through 108 *vels* pierced into the skin on the chest and back
kebatinan	mysticism
kerah	steel bangle, one of the five emblems of the Sikh
kesh	unshaven hair, one of the five emblems of the Sikh
khalsa	pure, the baptized Sikh
kirpan	dagger, one of the five emblems of the Sikh
kirtan	hymns sung in Gurmukhi
kitab jawi	Jawi scriptures
kitab kuning	yellow scriptures (indicating its well-used state)
kitab usul al-din	scriptures on the roots or fundamentals of religion which form the basis of theology
korban	ritual slaughter of animals according to Muslim rites for Hari Raya Haji
Krishna Jayanti	festival celebrating the birth of Krishna
Kshatriyas	warriors
lughah	Arabic grammar
madrasah	religious school
mahants	head of a Sikh religious centre or institution

mahfudzat	a codex of Muslim scholars' traditions
Mazhabi	those of lower Hindu castes who convert to Sikhism
mujaddid	receivers
mujahidin	warriors of Islam
mujtahid	the person with the authority to pass an *ijtihad*
muthalah al-hadith	science of methodology of the Hadith
nahu	Arabic grammar
Pali	a Prakit language that is a scriptural and liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism
pater familias	father of the family
pesantren	Muslim boarding schools in Indonesia
pondok	Muslim boarding school
Ponggal	a harvest festival from Tamilnadu
Puranic	that of the tradition of the eighteen collections of Hindu mythological scriptures
qira'ah	the reading of the Qur'an
Radha Soami Satsang	a religious sect that incorporates teachings of the Sikh scriptures with that of its religious leaders, both past and present
rathams	chariots
Rehat Meryada	codes of conduct
rukhsah	exemption
sabha	assembly
sahijdhari	those who abide by the teachings of the ten gurus but do not necessarily maintain the Khalsa appearance
salaf	first generation of Muslims
salaffiyah	early reformist
salwar kameez	ethnic Punjabi costume
samadhi	state of higher cognition; completion, contemplation or absorption
samelans	gatherings
San-gui-yi	Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha)
Sanatan Dharma	pluralistic mode of Sikh tradition popular in the 19th century
Sangha	Buddhist order of monks and nuns
Sant	holy teacher
sarflsaraf	branch of Arabic grammar concerning gender and number
sati	virtuous woman

satsang	literally, true company; company of a higher truth, guru or assembly of people who listen to or talk about truth
seva	service
sevadars	providers of service
Shuntian Gong	Temple of Submission to Heaven
Sikh	Seeker
Singh	Lion
sirah	biography of Prophet Muhammad
Sivarathi	annual festival dedicated to Siva
siyasa	Islamic government and politics
shan-tang	benevolence hall
Sudras	peasants
sunna	words and deeds attributed to the Prophet Muhammad
syariah	code of law derived from the Qur'an and from the teachings and example of Muhammad
syura	consensus
tafsir	Qur'anic exegesis or commentary
tahzib	teaching of discipline or moral education, sometimes called as *ta'dib* or *ta'adib*
tajwid	method of reciting the Qur'an in proper intonations and notes
takaful	Islamic insurance
tarikat	path or Sufi order
tasawur	Islamic worldview
tauhid	belief in the unity of God or monotheism, pertaining to basic Islamic faith to affirm the Oneness of Allah
Timiti	fire-walking festival in honour of the mother goddess, Mariamman
tudung	veil or headcover worn by Muslim women
ulama	Islamic scholars
ummah	entire Muslim community
umrah	minor pilgrimage
usrah	reading and discussion circles
ustaz	teacher
usul al-din	roots or fundamentals of religion which form the basis of theology
usul fiqh	principles of jurisprudence

Vaisayas	farmers and traders
vedas	any of the oldest and most authoritative Hindu sacred texts, composed in Sanskrit and gathered into four collections
wajib	obligatory
wakaf	endowments
waris	potential beneficiaries/guardian
wirid	chants and verses for supplications
xin-tu	believers
xiu xin	spiritual cultivation
yaagam	Vedic sacrifice
yao-cai-dian	traditional herbal shop

INTRODUCTION

Lai Ah Eng

BACKGROUND

Religious and ethno-religious issues are inherent in multiethnic and multi-religious societies, and require ongoing attention.

Singapore is no exception. It has long been a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious society, being historically and contemporarily at the crossroads of some of the world's major and minor civilizations, cultures, religions and traditions. Today, every major religious tradition in Singapore probably has within it a full religious spectrum, from orthodox, traditional orientations to reform movements and independent spiritual clusters, while other minor religions and movements have created or renewed spaces, membership and expressions in the rapidly evolving city. Most have regional and global links and influences. Religious affiliation is high and religious identification is strong among the population. These have also occurred against a background of growing religiosity and religious change since the 1970s. Recent global, regional and local events and developments have further put the spotlight on religion, and raised issues concerning religious identity, inter-religious relations and their impact on social cohesion.

Despite the diverse and dynamic religious landscape however, there is a lack of in-depth knowledge, nuanced understanding and regular dialogue about various religions and the meanings of living in Singapore's multi-religious world. Indeed, claims of ignorance, lack of inter-religious understanding, dialogue and interaction, negative stereotyping and other inter-religious encounters among individuals and groups present potential points of misunderstanding and tension. Some overlaps between ethnicity and religion further lend a heightened dimension and significance to ethno-religious identities and issues. While much is happening on the ground,

studies and published literature are few or limited in scope and research has generally fallen behind realities and developments. Literature on various religions, while abundant, tends to be focused on their respective religious concerns and congregations. There is a lack of systematic studies or surveys and little on religion in national census coverage.

Recognizing that religious diversity and issues in Singapore need to be better appreciated, understood and managed, The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) undertook the Research Project on Religious Diversity and Harmony in Singapore (2004–2007). The project's objectives were threefold: (1) to identify key trends and issues, (2) to offer insights and suggestions for policy, practice and social management, and (3) to contribute to inter-religious understanding and harmony, in the interests of social cohesion and the common good in Singapore. Given the challenging nature of the project, it was necessarily a collective effort. A conceptual brainstorming session with invited religious and civil society representatives, academics and interested individual citizens was first conducted in February 2004, followed by a workshop on 1–2 September 2005 during which thirty research papers were discussed.

This book is the final outcome of the IPS research project and comprises revised versions of most of its workshop papers. Its themes follow closely that of the research project, while its chapters' varying emphases on research, educational value and management implications reflect the project's objectives. While focused on Singapore, the book bears in mind the wider and unavoidable global and regional impulses and impacts on Singapore's religious diversity, and these are discussed wherever relevant, in many chapters.

The chapters themselves are the outcomes of individuals' own responses to the call for participation and of invitations to some to undertake specific topics within their areas of research and expertise. The schedules of potential participants, as much as the project's own timing, largely determined the final list of chapter writers, who consist of academics, religious practitioners and graduate students. All chapters are based on their writers' own recent research works or on research specifically conducted for the project. Coming from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, the researchers' approaches and methodologies are wide-ranging. They include questionnaires, surveys, interviews, focused group discussions, participant and naturalistic observations, case studies and philosophical and personal reflections, besides referring to a variety of published sources. As such, all chapters contain much primary and secondary data of both a quantitative and qualitative nature.

THE BOOK'S THEMES AND SUMMARIES OF CHAPTERS

This book's twenty-eight chapters are arranged along five themes: first, Singapore's religious landscape, followed by religion in the specific arenas of schools and the young, media, social services, and interfaith issues and interaction.

Theme I on Singapore's religious landscape is the most extensively covered, with twelve chapters exploring both macro forces and specific religions and issues that reflect Singapore's diversity and give meaning to its specific contexts, expressions and nuances.

Chapter 1 by Tham Seong Chee aptly opens up the landscape's diversity and complexity, first with a tracing of the long journey travelled by religion in general from about the fifteenth century to the present, followed by a discussion of the religious impulses and influences that impact on Singapore in particular. Shedding insights on the relationship between state and religion on the one hand and between religion and society on the other, Tham points out that the religion-based meaning system or "sacred canopy" of the past has, along religion's journey, undergone change and differentiation consequent on several inter-related processes of secularization, globalization, modern capitalism, democratic liberalism and pluralism. The religious impulse remains, but now has to take into account the dominance of the state where the "laws of man" supersede the "laws of God" in the management of contemporary problems and needs. The religious response itself to pluralism and secularism is manifested in different forms, from accommodation to rejection and opposition. How these developments have an impact on secular and multi-religious Singapore are then examined briefly through the following: the state's secular policy in relation to the society's religious diversity; several contentious issues such as abortion, stem cell research, human organ transplants, the building of integrated resorts which include casinos (which in turn raise issues of gambling addiction and prostitution), and gay rights; and the rise of new religions.

Major religious trends, various religions and religious issues in Singapore are given focused and detailed attention in Chapters 2 to 12. In Chapter 2, Tong Chee Kiong offers, through census data, an analysis of the religious landscape in Singapore, from the early days of its founding to the present. The picture that emerges is one in which the society is marked by a high degree of multi-religiosity, as well as significant changes in the religious landscape. In different periods, religions have waxed and waned. Some, such as Christianity, have been highly successful in recruiting members while

others, such as Taoism, have seen their memberships decline. The data also shows that there is a correlation between religious affiliation and several socio-demographic variables, including age, education, occupation, and socio-economic status. For example, Christians in Singapore tend to be younger, more educated and have a higher socio-economic status, whereas Taoists tend to be older, less educated and come from lower socio-economic groups. Another key variable is ethnicity. Religious affiliation is culturally or ethnically structured to some extent, with most Malays being Muslim, most Indians being Hindu, and Chinese, to a lesser degree, adopt Chinese religions.

The state's management of religion as part of Singapore's religious landscape is given focused attention in Chapter 3 by Eugene Tan. He points out the paradox in which Singapore is a secular state and multi-racial country yet religion is envisaged to have a role in nation-building, and asks whether, given religion's tremendous pull on Singaporeans of various faiths, a strong religious identity can co-exist with a strong Singaporean identity. He examines the state's institutional and legal framework for secularism and the management of religion in Singapore within the governing ethos of multiculturalism (which includes multi-religiosity), highlighting the plethora of institutions overseeing various faiths which nestles with a coercive, pre-emptive legislative regime in forestalling any religious extremism and interfaith conflicts. He argues that the fear of vulnerability in the post-9/11 "war against terror" ensures that scrutiny, surveillance and sensitivity would be hallmarks of the state's tightrope walk between secularism on the one hand, and wielding control and influence over religion and its expression for the purposes of state- and nation-building, on the other. He also examines the policy impulses behind the state's co-option of religion to reinforce the teaching of moral values, to sustain economic vitality, and to urge the practice of one's religion in keeping with the secular and multi-racial mores of Singaporean society.

Subsequent Chapters 4 to 12 following the macro contexts discussed in earlier chapters to examine specific religions which make up and add to the dynamic local religious landscape, each through its own particular features, expressions and developments. These include both "old" and "new" religions, such as Islam, the "minority" religion in Singapore and "majority" religion in Southeast Asia and currently undergoing a global gaze; Christianity, the religion that came alongside colonialism and now returning via global evangelical circuits; Hinduism and India-derived religions; Buddhism; the Sathya Sai Baba Movement; Sikhism and the Baha'i Faith.

In Chapter 4, Azhar Ibrahim looks at discourses on Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, and examines their impact on the Singapore Muslim public. He identifies the following as the main

subjects and issues in the dominant discourses on Islam in Singapore: Islamizing trends in Muslim intellectual and cultural life; the denouncement of secularism and humanism; the advocacy of plurality, diversity and moderation; and the debate on reformism versus traditionalism in which both competitively claim authenticity. He further argues that the [under]development of certain discourses amongst the Muslim public is conditioned by "gatekeepers", which in turn determines the types and quality of local discourse on Islam. He concludes with a call for critical reflection of both favoured and absent discourses.

While the main Christian churches and denominations such as Catholicism, Methodism and Presbyterianism have long established themselves in Singapore since early colonial days, contemporary evangelical Christianity in Singapore that makes the city appear as the Antioch of Asia is the subject of Jean DeBernardi's investigation in Chapter 5. She provides a brief background on the development of diverse forms of evangelical Christianity in Europe, North America and Singapore, and analyses several common forms of evangelical practice. She also investigates the ways in which contemporary Singaporean Christians interpret the call to be evangelical in their Christian practice, and the local impact of global Christian networks whose leaders often propose innovative Christian practices using mass media and contemporary technologies, but which are sometimes construed by non-Christians as being aggressive proselitization. Because Christian leaders play a crucial role in proposing or rejecting such forms of evangelical practice to their followers, she concludes that the most appropriate response to potentially insensitive forms of proselytization is education and dialogue.

In Chapter 6, Vineeta Sinha departs from the "traditional" Hinduism commonly associated with many local Indians, to focus on new religiously-inspired "India-derived" movements and groups, which have added much diversity to Singapore's religious landscape since their importation in the mid-1960s and which now attract a substantial number of followers, including from outside the Indian-Hindu community. Many of these groups, including the Ramakrishna Mission, Radha Soami Satsang, Brahma Kumari Raja Yoga Centre, Sai Baba Movement and Sri Aurobindo Society, do not perceive themselves to be "religious" or "non-Hindu" even if some have developed within the framework of Hinduism, and show a considerable variety of beliefs, practices and organizational structures. At the same time they share some generic or common features such as the founder guru; claims to universal appeal and membership by individual choice and a personal quest; "difference" from mainstream, institutionalized religions especially in promoting a de-ritualized stance; a claim to a logical, rational and modernist

approach to life and spirituality while also asserting a connection with ancient wisdom and tradition; and a focus on the individual and his/her self-development, at the same time subscribing to the notion of *seva* (community service) as essential practice. The author also explores the groups' functioning as conditioned by local multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity while being connected with centres in India and elsewhere, and offers some explanation for their appeal to English-speaking, literate, middle-class and upper-class professionals and members of different ethnic groups and religious sensibilities.

In Chapter 7, Foo Check Woo and Lynette Thomas examine the patterns of conversion within a less known and "new" religion in Singapore that arrived in the 1950s which saw a peak of membership only in the 1980s and 1990s — the Baha'i Faith. The authors' small-scale study shows Baha'i converts and adherents to be mainly young, English-speaking, middle-class with tertiary education, and Chinese, many of whom were formerly Taoists or Christians but were dissatisfied with their former religions. Many had also converted when they were overseas students in North America, or are Malaysian in origin, while a significant percentage of adherents are from "other" ethnic backgrounds. Their study also examined the decisions among converts to embrace the faith in terms of the attractiveness of its spiritual principles — Progressive Revelation, the Oneness of God and the Unity of Mankind — and its social teachings located in the independent investigation of truth, the need for harmony between religion and science, and the principle of equal opportunities for men and women. Besides shedding some light on this little known community, the study also reveals some of the complex religious, inter-religious and cultural aspects of conversion, particularly at the personal and familial levels.

In Chapter 8, Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng also departs from the "traditional" Buddhism commonly associated with many local Chinese to focus on its reformist nature. She examines the processes of religious modernization and Buddhicization within the Singapore Buddhist landscape which has resulted in a movement towards Reformist Buddhism, as well as examines its unifying religious ideology. She also explores the extent to which this development appeals to modern needs and its impact on policy formulation for religious harmony.

Chapter 9 by Nagah Devi Ramasamy follows from the earlier chapter on India-derived new religious movements to focus on one such movement — the Sathya Sai Baba. She examines the movement in charities and social service provision as well as its facility in foster multiethnic and multi-religious identity amongst Singaporeans, through its philosophy of communal identity construction and *seva* (community service). She also explores a

significant development in the local religious landscape: the communal union between the multi-ethnic cum multi-religious memberships existing within the local Sai Baba Movement.

Chapter 10 by Noor Aisha Abdul Rahman follows from the earlier chapter on the impact of Islamic discourses in Southeast Asia on Singapore to focus on the local dominant Muslim religious elites or *ulama*. Using the sociological concept of traditionalism, the author provides rare and valuable insights into the *ulamas*' backgrounds and styles of thought as portrayed in their writings found in the Malay media and other sources such as their sermons. She also examines the concretization of their traditionalist mode of thinking in relation to some significant issues and events affecting the Malay Muslim community, such as organ donation and transplant, stem cell research, secular knowledge (versus religious knowledge), reason (versus traditionalism), the wearing of headscarves in schools, the arrests of local Jemaah Islamiyah members and madrasah education. She further looks at how the "new" traditionalist *ulama* attempt to deal with modern issues such as government and politics, the economy, globalization, poverty and development. Finally, she also discusses the impact and ramifications of the *ulama*'s traditiionalism on the general development of the Malay community and its political participation within Singapore. As a political force itself, she shows how this religious elite is essentially apolitical but works to be recognized and legitimated as the sole experts and authority on Islam and on knowledge and modern issues affecting the Muslim community, over and above the Malay political leadership.

In Chapter 11, Arunajeet Kaur also focuses on a little-known religion — that of the small Sikh community in Singapore. Although the Sikhs are a visible and ostensibly homogenous community due to their unique physical appearance and established places of Sikh worship (*gurdwaras*), her study reveals a different reality. It points out that, over time since immigration, Sikhs in Singapore have evolved away from the Sikh religious ideals propagated by the religious authorities in original homeland Punjab, with only one-third of local Sikhs maintaining their unique appearance, and a further select minority within this third understanding and practising the religion as institutionalized by the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee* (SGPC) in Amritsar, Punjab. Arunajeet's study charts and explains the evolution of Sikh identity in Singapore, taking us through colonial and post-colonial time periods and major specific phenomenon and issues set within broader social and economic contexts. The picture is at once a story of immigration and settlement and of inter-generational adaptations and changes. The latter are reflected most visibly in the physical differences among the *Amrit Dharis*,

Sahaj Dharis and "cropped" and intricately in the identity and community issues involving the *Khalsa/Amrit Dhari* identity, the gurdwaras' leadership, language and competing lifestyles for families, genders and youth.

The final chapter in this segment on the diversity of Singapore's religious landscape offers an illustrative example of religious expression in the city. In Chapter 12, Lily Kong explores the ways in which Thaipusam processions — one of the most colourful, organized, and long-lasting religious processions in Singapore — by their very visibility foreground the relationships between the secular and the sacred, while contributing to a construction of identity and community and simultaneously surfacing fractures therein. She examines the secular state's management of religious processions, including the regulation of time and space for such events as well as over their noise production, and the tactics of adaptation, negotiation and resistance in participants' responses to the state's management. She also explores participants' experience of these processions in terms of two contrasting senses of *communitas* and fault-lines within "community" based on age, class and nationality; their investment of sacred meanings in these processions and the nature of their "sacred experience"; and the manner in which such activities, associated state actions, and participants' responses evoke reactions from non-participants.

Theme II focuses on religion in schools and among the young. The school being a major site and agent of state and institutional policies as well as of personal development and group dynamics, its religious orientations and influences are important aspects of early religious socialization, experiences and inter-religious encounters among the young. These aspects, as well as religious orientations and shifts among the young themselves, reveal much about religious diversity and change in Singapore.

In Chapter 13, Charlene Tan examines the teaching of religion in schools. She first discusses the government's attempts to teach religious beliefs and practices in Singapore schools for the purposes of inculcating moral values and promoting citizenship education, initially through the compulsory Religious Knowledge (RK) subject introduced to all secondary schools in the 1980s, followed by a new Civics and Moral Education (CME) programme which replaced RK in 1992, and to a lesser extent through National Education (NE) launched in 1997. She argues that the government's approach of introducing various religions to students in a historical, objective and detached manner makes it difficult for students to imbibe the moral teachings propounded by the religions or be committed to promoting religious harmony. She further argues for the introduction of Spiritual Education (SE) in terms of its enduring value on personal development, its advantage in avoiding the problems and challenges associated with a multi-religious subject, and its

encouragement to act morally driven by intrinsic reasons rather than for reasons stipulated by the state.

The discussion on teaching religion in government and government-aided schools is followed by an examination of two distinct types of religion-related education in the Muslim *madrasah* and the Christian mission schools.

In Chapter 14, Sa'eda Buang examines religious education in the *madrasah* which is expected to offer a curriculum that focuses on religious subjects in keeping with its role as an institution to produce Muslim religious elites. Historically, national and economic development and demands of the state, particularly during the post-World War II period, have necessitated the *madrasah* to revisit its long-held position as classical curriculum practitioner time and again. An earlier resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in the early twentieth century also sought to effect *madrasah* curriculum reform, which was swiftly put in place but short-lived. In recent years, the curriculum purpose of the six remaining full-time *madrasah* has again come under scrutiny and reformulation, to make them be responsive to larger economic and socio-political transformations. The author examines two main aspects of *madrasah* education: the socio-historical aspect of *madrasah* curriculum development and main issues such as syllabuses, subjects and texts; and the underlying philosophical considerations. In explicating on the interplay of socio-educational determinants and principles that affect curriculum planning, she points out that power assertions between elite groups and the Muslim public have directly stunted the growth and progress of early *madrasah* education and subsequently, even though the curriculum has been in dire need of reform and the Muslim community itself is in need of change in religious and social outlook. She concludes that present challenges to *madrasah* education are multi-faceted and formidable — not only must there be a formulation of an all-encompassing and yet achievable curriculum purpose that combines a sound philosophy of man and education, mental dexterity, pragmatism, vision as well as a strong sense of humanity, there must also be the ability to galvanize support from various quarters for such a curriculum.

In Chapter 15, the role of religion as moral and spiritual "benefits" in the Christian mission schools that came alongside colonialism are given particular focus by Robbie Goh. He briefly traces their historical role and development and ascertains the means by which they achieved a reputation for excellence and maintained that reputation even after independence and the creation of a national school system. Although mission schools have had to negotiate their distinctive character in the light of national educational imperatives and currents, the quality of a distinctive school "spirit" and its "moral" benefits, which have been effected largely through non-curricular or structural means,

have persisted throughout their history. The result is a distinctive character of mission schools which has been broadly acknowledged to play a significant part in the Singapore educational landscape not only or primarily in academic terms, but also in terms of the "moral" training for which these schools are held in high regard. The author points out that the superior efficacy of moral influence (which arises from the inherently Christian nature of the mission schools) over a Religious Knowledge (RK) curricular approach (in which a multi-religious, pluralistic curriculum is inculcated through abstract classroom dictates), argues for an enhancement of the structural leeway given to mission schools to carry out their project of Christian moral influence. At the same time, he notes that a number of safeguards clearly have to be set in place to protect the religious sensibilities of non-Christian students and to avoid Christian evangelization.

Chapter 16 shifts the attention from schools and policies to school adolescents. Picking up on the major trend of religious conversion and switching in Singapore, Phyllis Chew reports on her study of religious switching and knowledge among school adolescents in this chapter. Her study reveals a notable permeation of religious thought in adolescent life with 82 per cent of adolescents identifying themselves as having a religion, primarily the Buddhist, Christian and Muslim faiths. The most common period for adolescent religious switching to occur is between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, with switchers mainly from the Buddhist/Taoists, Christian and Hindu faiths, and often facing parental opposition initially. On the whole, adolescents switch not because of a personal quest for truth but because of peer-group influences and the need to "solve a problem". The popular choice for a switch is from Taoism to Christianity, and/or from Buddhism to free-thinker status. When the switch is to Christianity, it is also to a church that is youth-focused and that preaches a this-worldly gospel of care, cheer and prosperity. The switch away from the Taoist/Buddhist faiths is because of adolescents' disenchantment with the practice of their rites/rituals and their inability to operate in the adolescents' preferred language choice of English or Mandarin. The study also reveals adolescents' knowledge of religions to be poor, drawn mainly from Internet and chat-room sites and peer groups. At the same time, most are aware of the need to be tolerant of religions in multi-religious Singapore and not to be offensive.

The third theme of religion and religious diversity in Singapore relates to that which takes place in one of the most public spaces of information and exchange of views — the media. Two chapters discuss two important religion-related issues as discoursed through the media — homosexuality and Internet

use for religious purposes — and surface issues pertaining to the secular-religious distinction in the public sphere and the potentials for religious harm and harmony through cyberspace.

In Chapter 17, Kenneth Paul Tan looks at the way the national print media stage-managed public debate in 2003 over the question of non-discriminatory hiring policies in the Singapore Civil Service with respect to homosexuals. Through a close reading of mostly "pro-gay" and "anti-gay" arguments voiced, in particular the religiously inflected arguments of authorities from the Muslim, Buddhist, Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian communities, he locates obstacles to an open, free, empirically supported, normatively justified and sincere discussion that should ideally characterize a mature public sphere. He suggests that it is the artificial distinction between the religious and the secular, and the insistence on formal secularism that excludes all religious reasons from the public sphere, that has been responsible for a public sphere that is defensive, dogmatic and disengaged, and that distorts the capacity for more open public dialogue motivated by a collective pursuit of higher-order knowledge of what is good. The strict and formal secularism can also have the effect of demonizing religious reasons and transforming them into a defensive discourse, with complexity, subtlety, variety, and engagement being distorted into simple "us" versus "them" modes of reasoning. The author points out that the case study clearly shows that religious people and even authorities can have a range of views ranging from the conservative to the most liberal, but a siege mentality reduces discussion into a battlefield of rigid notions of good and evil and right and wrong, all marked by suspicion and hostility between the forces of religion and secularism. Finally, he suggests that the media can play a more strategic role in stage-managing future public debates to produce and admit more nuanced arguments that destabilize simple "pro" and "anti" modes of discussion, starting with removing the religious/secular distinction in the public sphere so as to free up discussion, remove suspicion and increase good faith in one another.

In Chapter 18, Randolph Kluver et al. examine Internet use by Singaporeans for religious purposes. Recognizing that the Internet is becoming a popular medium for gaining access to religious information, teachings, communities and experiences, the authors note that it is a rich source of both useful and false and sometimes inflammatory information about religious faiths. Their study, based on a national survey and interviews with religious leaders, pays attention to the way the Internet might increase or decrease religious understanding and harmony among diverse faith communities.

Some interesting findings include the following: (1) the Internet has become an important source for religious information and activity in Singapore, in line with global trends; (2) most survey respondents believed that the Internet can be a potential threat to religious harmony; (3) Singaporeans use the Internet more for matters related to their own religion than to learn about other religions; (4) Singaporeans are more likely to use local sites for religious purposes than foreign sites; (5) firm support by Singaporeans and religious leaders for government regulation of the Internet on religious matters; (6) most religious leaders see the Internet as a helpful medium for users to learn both about their own and about other religions; and (7) some religious leaders believe that the Internet provides an easy context for religious conflict through the posting of harmful materials and are concerned over the authenticity of religious information online.

Theme IV is about the roles of religious organizations in social services — a domain which many are traditionally strong in and have continued to remain so through a re-invention of themselves and flexible adjustments to the larger multi-religious environment and secular state. Chapters 19 to 22 trace the motivations, roles and activities of Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Hindu-based organizations in the development of the local social services sector historically and contemporarily. They also discuss the organizations' collaboration with the state and other selected intra-, inter-religious and secular organizations, and the forces and impulses which motivate them to do so.

Enon Mansor and Nur Amali Ibrahim, in two distinct sections in Chapter 19, discuss the historical and contemporary roles and activities of Muslim agencies and mosques as social service providers. For Muslim agencies, the majority of their clients remain Muslims, but they also service a sizeable percentage of non-Muslims. They have also established external relationships and collaborations with state agencies and other non-Muslim organizations, both faith-based and secular. Working with non-Muslim organizations seems to be part and parcel of their experiences and a practical necessity, Muslims being a minority. However, they ensure that the collaboration effort is consistent with Muslim beliefs and practices. This section also discusses the internal and external dynamics that contribute to the organizations' rationale, guiding principles and perceptions in collaborating with non-Muslim organizations, which are also common perceived to be easier to work with in some respects than Muslim organizations.

The second section on mosques shows that besides being places for prayers, they are also important institutions which address social issues in the community. The experiences of four different mosques studied reveal a

huge range of social services offered to meet different needs of various segments of the Muslim population as well as their varied resources, collaborations and leadership and orientations/values. Some common problems faced by mosques in social services provision include insufficient funding, lack of expertise, ineffective use of available resources, and gaps in expectations between mosque staff and congregants. Although the mosques' social services programmes cater mostly to the Muslims, there are spaces in which interaction between Muslims and people of other religious groups takes place, including those for fostering inter-religious understanding and correcting misperceptions about Islam.

In Chapter 20, Sinniah Vivakanandan and Nagah Devi Ramasamy examine the role of Hindu temples in social services. They trace the historical evolution of the temple, from being a focal centre for worship, interaction and safe haven for early Hindu migrant workers to their position as largely places of ritualistic worship by the 1970s. However, temples have been subject to pressures for change towards greater performance of the mandatory *seva* (service) since the 1980s, such pressures coming from more informed and educated devotees and neo-spiritual movements, loss of youth members unable to identify with rituals, and examples set by organisations of other religions. The authors also identify gaps in current services rendered and offer recommendations for future development of social service by Hindu temples.

Chapter 21 by Kuah-Pearce Khun Eng focuses on Buddhist institutions in the delivery of welfare services. She examines the intersection of state ideology and Buddhist ideology which produces a philanthropic Buddhist culture that encourages Buddhist organizations and individuals to become actively involved in charity works and social and welfare services. Concretely, she traces how the Buddhist temple, through its Buddhist *Sangha* and the Buddhist notion of compassion, has always been simultaneously a sacred and welfare space as it evolved over time, first as home for the destitute and tea house for the needy, and then to benevolence hall, medical free clinic, and provider of shelter and services.

Christian churches have historically been involved in social service provision, especially so among those strongly rooted in "social gospel" theology which emphasizes good works for the betterment of humanity as the unique call of Christians. However, in Chapter 22, Mathew Mathews examines the case of Protestant churches in Singapore which, to a large extent, are theologically conservative and traditionally more concerned with "soul saving" than "bread giving" but which, together with church-affiliated social service organizations, form the largest block in Singapore's social service landscape. He establishes the main types of services they offer: help for families and

youth; half-way houses, care facilities including hospitals and institutional homes; and facilities for the disabled. He also examines their motivations for involvement — integrating faith and works and obtaining legitimacy vis-à-vis the state and community — and describes how ideological, spiritual and material resources are mobilized. In examining how Protestant churches and their organizations are successful in adapting to the secular state and multi-religious society, he also discusses the common perception that their social service provision is a front for proselitization.

The fifth and final theme focuses on what probably constitutes the most difficult and challenging about religious diversity: interfaith issues and interaction. Given their inevitability and their potentials for both peace and conflict, it is necessary to understand their specific forms and expressions, and the principles and values by which they are approached by individuals and groups, leaders and laities, and the society as a whole. Four chapters help us towards this understanding.

Ten Chin Liew leads the way with a philosophical approach to understanding religious diversity in Chapter 23. He argues for acknowledging the existence of genuine, but sometimes incompatible or even conflicting beliefs about religious matters as our starting point, in order to face a central political issue of the basis on which people with such differences are to live together harmoniously and in cooperation with one another. In his view, the first step is to establish good grounds for religious toleration: having a proper understanding and application of religious beliefs, showing respect for sincere believers of all kinds by letting them lead their lives in accordance with their fundamental values so long as they do not harm others, and rejecting a theocratic state in favour of a secular one. At the same time, he sees mere toleration as being insufficient as it is compatible with mutually tolerant religious groups living compartmentalized lives without any dialogue or interaction. He observes that in Singapore, several other social ingredients have been added in order to avoid this, including housing and educational policies and a meritocratic approach. He argues in particular for a meritocratic society which, properly tempered, provides opportunities for social mobility and encourages the emergence of multiple and criss-crossing social identities whereby religious divisions need not coincide with, and be amplified by, other social divisions.

In Chapter 24, Mathew Mathews focuses on a specific area of inter-religious interaction: how Christian clergymen negotiate their religion with other religions. This is a particularly valuable chapter, given that the steady growth of Christianity in Singapore, especially the more conservative segment of it, is a cause for concern in terms of inter-religious harmony as this

category is allegedly more resistant to enter into partnerships with other religious groups and opposed to making concessions and compromises to their exclusivist faith and practice. Through a study of a diverse sample of clergymen, Mathews documents their views on four areas of tension — inter-religious dialogue, inter-religious relations, evangelistic practices and participation in non-Christian ritual — and relate these to various demographic and attitudinal variables. He further demonstrates how clergymen attempt to negotiate the tensions between their evangelistic mission and their need to peacefully co-exist in a secular nation state, by providing theological rationalizations while being always mindful not to dilute their exclusivist stance.

In Chapter 25, Lai Ah Eng explores the relatively old and only inter-religious set-up in Singapore: Inter-Religious Organization (IRO). She traces the IRO's historical development and major activities since 1949, as well as examines some of the inherent issues raised and problems encountered in inter-religious relations and collaboration even as such an organization aspires to spread inter-religious goodwill and understanding and share similar values drawn from their respective religious traditions. In assessing its contributions to interfaith awareness, peace and understanding, she argues that the IRO, despite some of its weaknesses and lack of statutory authority, is a necessary inter-religious institution in a multi-religious society.

Chapter 26 by Phua Chao Rong, Anita Hui and Yap Ching Wi explores another new dimension of interfaith relations: conscious and active attempts at interfaith engagement among youth leaders. The authors identify some ground realities of youth interfaith engagement in Singapore that have developed largely only the last few years and conclude that this engagement is limited and in need of improvement and better coordination in general. They also point out how the social taboo of religion as sensitive has contributed to the abstinence from and lack of interest in youth interfaith work, while the sensitivities of interfaith engagement potentially compromise its integrity and future development and success. They further identify another important factor limiting the development of interfaith engagement: the intergenerational gaps between leaders (seniors) and participants (youths). Finally, they argue for stronger grass-roots collaborations between faith-based organizations with a clear set of direction, support and guidelines set by governmental agencies, and the leadership and shared knowledge by the long-established IRO. Concretely, they propose a four-phase model for youth interfaith engagement based on friendship, social action, mutual study and intellectual exchange, with the objective being to build a foundation of interfaith youth leaders and a working understanding of various religious teachings.

The final chapter under the theme of interfaith issues and interaction is, perhaps aptly, one that describes a personal journey of encountering faith and the interfaith, interspersed with scholarly insights on interfaith dialogue and understanding. In Chapter 27, See Guat Kwee traces her journey in Christian-Muslim relations in Singapore and overseas. Her journey had first begun during a stay in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a Christian. That stay led her next to interfaith issues and the Muslim community upon her return to Singapore, and onto graduate studies in the United States where she met scholars and practitioners of interfaith dialogue and obtained a better understanding of the history and contexts of Christian-Muslim relationships. In living and studying together with Muslims, she was able to experience a community bonded by friendship and the pursuit of understanding and peace. She sees an urgent need for Christian-Muslim and other types of interfaith dialogue as a way to build relationships between people of different faiths, with this endeavour encompassing both joint study and scholarship and working together on practical projects. The aim is to overcome mutual ignorance, appreciate shared history and acknowledge collective past wrongs, deal with misconceptions and personal distrust, form friendships, and work together for peace and the common good. Towards this end, the author also offers concrete suggestions for Singapore: the establishment of a centre for dialogue and study of world religions and the creation of "Sister City" relationships to engage Singaporeans of different faiths, traditions and ages.

SOME REMARKS ON RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN SINGAPORE

This book does not make strong and firm conclusions about religious diversity in Singapore in view of the huge gaps of knowledge of the highly wide-ranging and complex landscape. Instead, in its concluding chapter, it identifies some important research and knowledge gaps, and makes some general remarks on the implications and challenges posed by several trends and dimensions of religious diversity for state-society and interfaith relations. These trends and dimensions pertain to the growing binary worldviews of secularism and religiosity and the artificial and antagonistic distinctions made between them; religious expressions in public spaces; religious proselytization and conversion; external religious influences and impacts on local communities; political mobilization by religion and its management by the state; and specific inter-religious issues.

The consequent need to clarify, balance and nuance diversity and unity within an "always under construction and in dialogue" approach and the

complexities and sensitivities of construction and dialogue are also raised. In particular, the section points out that the role of the state, since it is a key player, needs to be carefully considered and managed in seeking the diversity-unity balance, as too much diversity can result in divisiveness and fractiousness but too much control can mean state hegemony and repression. At the same time, it calls for going beyond the usual focus on the state to examine diverse religions and religious communities with their own worlds and realities as these offer motivations, fulfilments and meanings of their own which the state cannot or will not be able to substitute. Finally, while potential areas of inter-religious tensions require sensitive management, it is argued that interfaith education, dialogue and collaboration, despite their inherent difficulties, are likely to become an important mechanism and process in seeking the unity-diversity balance and in the ongoing construction of religious harmony.

The religious landscape in Singapore and indeed the world can only become more diverse. This book attests to the need, among others, for empirically grounded research and higher order social knowledge and insights into this unprecedented diversity, towards better social understanding and management of religion for the common good of all living in a multi-religious at the same time shared environment and nation-state.