

Jeyaretnam, something that may contribute to academics' understanding of how the Singapore government crushes dissent.

At times reading like a political pot-boiler, at other times reading like popular history, but never quite either, *Lee's Law* is never mundane. Indeed, rather than merely recounting a politician's life story, it recounts his struggles. Jeyaretnam's story is sadly also the story of many of those who suffer quietly under the PAP-dominated system, which is all the more tragic for being both highly pragmatic and subtly oppressive.

In spite of the book's journalistic style of writing, it holds academic value and academics should read and consider it when studying Singapore. Academic studies of opposition parties and politicians in Singapore have been few and far between. Although more are needed to increase the depth of Singapore studies, books such as *Lee's Law* provide a valuable resource that helps to fill in important gaps and increase insights into the political history of Singapore.

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Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*. 2006. London and New York: Routledge. 211 pp. ISBN: 0415263867

What makes Singapore history boring is the way in which the stories are usually narrated. Singapore history tends to be explained in terms of two representative figures: Stamford Raffles and Lee Kuan Yew. Raffles is the founding father of the port of Singapore while his reincarnation, Lee Kuan Yew, is founding father of the Singapore nation-state.

The author of the present book, Carl Trocki, is fully aware of this pitfall. To avoid it, he demonstrates Singapore history through an interesting theme: the power of the Chinese masses pitted against an alliance of other powers. These powers comprise the local English-educated Chinese elites and the forces of global Euro-American capital (p. 185).

The book can be broadly categorized into two sections. The first section (Chapters 1-3) narrates stories about Singapore from the pre-Raffles era until the Second World War. The second half of the book (Chapters 4-6) is about independent Singapore, from the time of transition after the Second World War until today.

The first chapter successfully explains the founding of Singapore by focusing on its geo-economic location. Singapore was located at a junction of three different trade routes: local trade, Chinese junk trade, and European trade by the East Indian Company. This geo-economic location provided the conditions for Singapore to become a secure base for the East Indian Company. Singapore was set up as a free port, accessible by traders regardless of nationality; and as a base for the opium trade. The Singapore economy was constructed by global capital through the opium trade and by a system of labour organization and exploitation.

That economic structure created the population dynamics of colonial Singapore society. This rich texture of population is illustrated in Chapter 2. One element was Europeans as the supplier of the global capital and as colonial masters. Another element was the Baba Chinese with a command of English as mediators between Europeans and local connections, or as small shop-owners. A third element was Chinese from mainland China as coolies to supply labour. Malays, too, continued to live in the urban areas of Singapore by engaging in fishing. Various Indian populations were also brought to Singapore, such as labourers for the rubber plantations, money lenders, and educated Indians as colonial servants. Singapore was a milieu of sub-ethnic divisions of dialect, region of origin and religion.

To understand politics within such a diverse society, the author conceives of Singapore as a type of 'joint venture' (p. 77). This joint venture comprised a partnership or 'condominium' between shifting groups of players or power brokers (p. 76). British colonial masters, powerful Chinese leaders, descendants of the Malay sultan, and English-educated locals all jointly negotiated their political spaces.

The second half of the book is about independent Singapore. Its narrative inevitably focuses on how the government established its power over the whole 'package' of Singapore.

After the Second World War, a certain group succeeded in gaining power: the English-educated Chinese. This group knew how to negotiate with the colonial masters and also how to negotiate with and utilize the Chinese masses. It was led by Lee Kuan Yew and several colleagues. Having gained power in the 1959 election, Lee carefully pushed the Chinese communists out of power by using the now notorious Internal Security Act. This section of the book examines legalized violence by the state power – a topic glossed over or even ignored by most safe textbooks of Singapore history.

Lee Kuan Yew's group controlled not only the political arena but also the social space. Chapter 5 illustrates how the middle class was depoliticized by the state's strategies. Two fundamental state ideologies designed a depoliticized mentality among Singaporeans. One is multiculturalism, which banned people from using ethnicity as a political vehicle. The other ideology was meritocracy. This created a merit-oriented culture through the education system, so that a politically indifferent technocratic elite was produced and placed at the top of the society. The government also controls the living space of Singaporeans by providing state housing (HDB flats).

Such control also encompasses the economic field. The government intervenes and controls every stage of Singapore's economic development. From the protection of local industries in the early 1960s to the Strategic Economic Plan of 1990, the government is actively involved in each step. It utilizes regulations and campaigns to mobilize and discipline a suitable labour force at each stage, while negotiating the flow of foreign investment. However, the author poses a doubt whether such strong state control over Singapore's economy can be sustained, in the face of globalization.

While the author's discussion of state control is useful, I did wonder while reading it whether it is still possible to draw such a clear-cut line between the state and the society. In line with his own theme of dynamic negotiation among players, ordinary Singaporeans should be recognized as active performers, rather than meekly controlled pawns. They are complicit in consolidating the state ideology or governance. They work hand in hand with the state to enact it through their everyday lives, although perhaps largely unaware that they are doing so. Examining that complicity could reveal still more facets of the complex power structure in Singapore.

To sum up, this book is good reading for all readers who wish to know more about Singapore, and for scholars who want to gain critical insights.

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