

exercises. We are more likely to read about the evil consequences of rent-seeking, clientelism and neo-patrimonialism for states that are captured by such ‘institutionalised parties’. Kuhonta does not ignore these issues, but he reminds the reader that these outcomes are not the concern of his thesis. The new capitalist class that has emerged under the NEP may be a rentier class, he argues, but this concern is relevant only to the extent that it has detracted from reducing poverty and income inequality.

Kuhonta writes very well and the argument is stylishly presented. Paradoxically, the most engaging and interesting sections of the book deal with those nations that have failed to deliver equitable growth, Thailand and the Philippines. His account of Malaysia, unfortunately, contains too many echoes of ‘spin’ from the UMNO archives and more than a hint of the Asian values myth propounded by former prime minister, Mahathir Mohamed, to attract us to his side. The section on Vietnam is brief and adds very little to what is generally known. The appendix relating to Fiji, Guyana and Sri Lanka is too cursory to add weight to the thesis and could just as well have been deleted.

The author knows full well that his thesis is controversial. He constantly repeats and defends his argument ‘that organizational power for social reform does not have to have an elective affinity with leftist ideology, nor must it be rooted in a democratic regime’ (p. 24). The problem is that while he illustrates the argument well — and in doing so makes an important contribution to comparative economic studies of Southeast Asian nations — the synthesis and analysis of his findings fall short and the reader remains unconvinced and even a little fearful that there should be any debate at all that politics matters.

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*Safe for decolonization: The Eisenhower administration, Britain, and Singapore*

By S.R. JOEY LONG

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Joey Long presents a very solid study, well researched, insightful, fair and articulate. Long’s work will interest and benefit anyone curious about the interplay between decolonisation, the Cold War, great power foreign policy and local agency in Southeast Asia. Long brings to bear, through diligent work in multiple archives and a sound grasp of existing literature, a rare combination: an informed understanding of both American foreign policy in Southeast Asia during the Cold War and the complexities with which it engaged both allied and local agendas. He does not make the all-too-common error of reducing local agency, in this case Singapore — through Singaporeans in general and political leaders in particular — to a supporting role in a discussion of British–American Cold War discourse. Nor does he subscribe to

the still too common and lazy view that political decolonisation in the region was a straightforward process of oppositional politics, first towards a declining European overlord, then to the emerging American assertiveness. Long rightly argues that it was just not that simple.

This book examines why, how and to what end the Eisenhower administration became involved in political change in Singapore, with particular reference to the Cold War. In so doing, Long displays commendable balance in judgement and does not subscribe to any of the ideological sacred cows that dot the field. Critical when the evidence so indicates, particularly regarding the Eisenhower administration's efforts to use covert intelligence and political operations to pursue its goals — or perhaps chase its ghosts — in a volatile Singapore, Long also gives credit where credit is due. This stems in part from his ability to lift his analytical gaze beyond the traditional confines of strategic problems and government-to-government intercourse, as catalogued so methodically in the FO371 and RG59 file series. Long's chapter on American cultural diplomacy brings out most strongly his sure grasp of both what made Singaporeans receptive to such approaches and how this fit into the larger policy picture. This chapter alone serves as a valuable response to a literature too ready to essentialise American Cold War practices in the Afro-Asian world. Singapore had particular characteristics that made it important to American Cold War priorities, receptive to some American influences, fractious when confronted by others.

The driving theme in Long's study is how the British, Americans and Singaporeans sought to fill the 'political space' being opened up by the larger process of Britain's contraction as a global power. His discussions of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and British policy regarding the deployment of nuclear weapons in Asia not only shed some new light on both problems, they also highlight important connections between these developments and the political development of Singapore. Long is somewhat critical of American efforts to evaluate and respond to political change in Singapore, in part due to contrasting them to simultaneous British evaluations and responses. But he rarely reaches beyond the evidence to do so, and retains his broad understanding of this relationship, as well as the importance of change over time. Effective American support for, and involvement in, labour and trade union politicisation in Singapore before 1958 gave way, from 1959, to a misreading of Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party (PAP) that he argues resonates still.

Perhaps Long's most important scholarly contribution is to put his questions, and their principals, into both perspective and context. This work should prompt scholars of Singaporean political history to reconsider the importance of external involvement in the complications of decolonisation. It should also act as a cautionary note to scholars inclined to write off American Cold War policy in Africa and Asia as uniformly clumsy, narrow and counterproductive. Long perhaps sheds less new light on British policy, apart from his detailed discussion of the deployment of nuclear weapons in Singapore. Conversely, this is one rare issue on which his judgement can perhaps be criticised. Without examining Chinese and Soviet archives, it is not possible to argue whether or not deploying nuclear weapons in Singapore made the island city any more or less endangered before the British withdrawal in 1971; and given the United Kingdom's own permanent status as a primary target for

nuclear warfare during the Cold War, it does not seem very apt to expect British decision-makers to have shown any more concern for the strategic vulnerability of an overseas territory. Long nevertheless demonstrates a solid grasp of both British sources and views, as well as the still lively debate over Eisenhower and his direction of American strategic foreign policy. There is too much ideological smoke surrounding the study of the Cold War in Southeast Asia and its relationship with political decolonisation. Long's study, at least for Singapore, stands as a welcome corrective.

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*Chinese circulations: Capital, commodities, and networks in Southeast Asia*

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As its introduction suggests, *Chinese circulations: Capital, commodities and networks in Southeast Asia* is a broad survey of the scholarship on the activities of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Spanning the fourteenth century up to the present, the chapters represent a wide variety of approaches, including commodities studies, and the accompanying business and ethnic studies anchored in sociological premises. In addition, the studies represent the increasing exploitation of a wide variety of sources, going beyond the traditional and already well-mined textual sources, such as Chinese company and organisational records, Chinese textual accounts and European sources including those of the Dutch East India Company, to include archaeological and numismatic data, ethnographic accounts, and non-governmental organisation reports. It showcases the approaches and methodologies developed and being used by scholars over the last two decades.

Consisting of 20 chapters, the volume is divided into five sections. Section one deals with a number of the key paradigms that have framed the study of the economic history of the overseas Chinese thus far, and include summaries of the primary theses of research by such scholars as Anthony Reid and Carl Trocki. Section two looks at the precolonial era (up to the early eighteenth century), and provides case studies on the organic nature of the dynamics of the overseas Chinese economic activities in Southeast Asia in the absence of more formal or institutional, transregional structures. Necessarily, the chapters in this section deal with themes pertaining to the nuts and bolts of trade, including competing systems of trade (Takeshi Hamashita), notions of currency circulations and cross-border usage (Li Tana) and of socio-economic 'value' as products move from source to market (Heather Sutherland), and the dynamics of the supply chain process (Masuda Erika). Sections three and four explore the early and high colonial eras, respectively, and provide vivid case studies on the negotiation and facilitation of economic activities in the face of changing, and increasingly rigid,