

coordination is not without problems (p. 85). Chapter 4 evaluates the transformation of Japanese social compromise, the “trajectory of a country that was one of the most equal in the 1970s and that has now become one of the least equal today among OECD countries” (p. 103), and tries to find its cause in the “re-segmentation” of the labor market in Japan. Lechevalier further complements his analysis of Japanese capitalism in transition investigating the education system (Chapter 5 with Arnaud Nanta), the innovation system (Chapter 6), and Japan’s adaptation to globalization (Chapter 7).

The contribution of this book is threefold. First, it substantially deepens our understanding of how Japanese capitalism has evolved since the 1980s. The author succeeds in showing a well-nuanced and balanced picture of Japanese political economy through thorough review of related empirical works. For example, he carefully follows the inequality debate in Japan, and concludes that while increasing inequality in Japan in the 1990s indicated by the Gini coefficient rise was in fact caused by the aging of the population, a rise in inequality among the young from the 2000s indicates transformation of Japanese social compromise due to labor market re-segmentation.

The second contribution of this book is its demonstration of the resiliency of diverse capitalisms today. Lechevalier’s careful and well-balanced review enables him to conclude that neoliberal policies established in Japan since the beginning of the 1980s have contributed to transforming Japanese capitalism, but that “the transformation of Japanese capitalism does not signify convergence towards American or European capitalisms,” and that “after an idiosyncratic trajectory, Japan still constitutes a pole of capitalist diversity” (p. 157). This book should be the must-read in the diversity of capitalism literature.

Finally, this book reinstates the value of political analysis in the study of capitalism diversity. Lechevalier’s observation that Japan’s transformation stems less from responses to challenges posed by globalization, technological progress, or crisis, but rather from the implementation of neoliberal reforms naturally leads him to the “political analysis” of transformation. His emphasis on the “dynamics of dominant social blocks and mediation by politicians” as an important force behind the reforms (p. 20) seems to be crucial in making sense of different trajectories of capitalism in our world.

My only complaint as a political scientist is the insufficiency of his political analysis. He seems to downplay a series of political reforms in the ‘lost decade.’ Although he briefly refers to the administrative reform, which has strengthened the prime minister’s leadership, he ignores other political reforms. Above all, the reform of the election system, which introduced the “single-member district” system in Japan should not be sidelined. A large body of works has emerged stressing its critical impact on neoliberal reforms, based on the “median-voter thesis.”

Despite this shortcoming, there is no doubt that this book makes a huge contribution in the field of comparative political economy.

*Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus.* By DONALD LOW and SUDHIR VADAKETH eds.  
Singapore: NUS Press, 2014. 272 pp. \$24 (Paper).

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Singapore and its often-referenced “exceptionalism” have long drawn attention from social scientists, if not for the country’s ostensible developmental success, then for its “policy lab” approach to addressing social, political, and economic challenges. Both the death of founding statesman Lee

Kuan Yew and the celebration of fifty years of independence, in 2015, have reinvigorated interest in questions of its successes, its policies, and its future.

Despite this general interest, few recent book-length scholarly works have been dedicated to critically assessing the nuances of Singapore's policy environment. *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*, edited by Donald Low and Sudhir Vadaketh, does just this, with a collection of fifteen chapters that cover a wide spectrum of territory related to the country's development. The policy backgrounds of both editors are reflected in the stated aims of the volume: to compile and examine an array of practical alternatives to the current political model, and to inject dynamism into policy debates, which the editors see as stunted by the binary framing often favored by the country's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) government.

The book is divided into three sections. The first explores Singapore's exceptionalism, addressing specifically whether long-held and simplistic assumptions about the success of the Singapore model obscure outcomes that are decidedly more complex. Included in that discussion are assessments of income inequality, the role of population growth in economic development, the nature of Singapore's meritocracy, and the challenges around identity formation in the diverse and ever-changing country. The second section examines policies in the key areas of population growth, housing, and social security, arguing in each case that there exists a range of credible alternatives to a status quo that no longer adequately addresses on-the-ground realities. The third section examines the past, current, and future dynamics of governance and democracy in Singapore's single party dominant system. These chapters focus especially on what is argued to be the erosion of the 'Singapore consensus'—in which an acquiescent population accepts restrictions on personal liberties in exchange for political stability and economic growth—and the paths through which Singapore's polity might evolve to include a greater spectrum of perspectives and participants.

Low and Vadaketh write that they are "less worried about the risks of polarisation than [they] are about the effects of incumbency, the inertia of the status quo, and the tyranny of old ideas and unquestioned, unchallenged ideologies" (p. 11). This position sets the tone for the book and makes it a refreshing contribution to policy discussions in a country where the bounds of political and social debates are often set quite narrowly. Importantly, Low and Vadaketh manage this open dynamic without resorting to the almost reflexive contrarianism that characterizes many other challenges to the Singapore model; the contributions are, with few exceptions, level-headed and pragmatic explorations of complex policy issues and their potential solutions.

While the book clearly is written to impact policy debates within Singapore, its accessible manner makes it well suited for non-specialists of the country to develop a more nuanced understanding of its policy environment. This makes it an important and timely contribution, given the frequent but often analytically thin references in popular publications like *The Economist* to Singapore's unique approach to development. Yet this emphasis on readability comes at the expense of technical discussions of policy detail. A student whose interests lie in understanding changes to the technical aspects of agenda setting, deliberation, and implementation of policy in the Singapore model, for example, might want additional detail and a more comprehensive development of key arguments. The discussion on meritocracy, for example, is effective in adding nuance to a debate that often employs only the broadest of brush strokes, but it ends short of presenting practical prescriptions for the range of sectors in Singapore that dogmatically adhere to the concept.

On the broadest level, Low and Vadaketh argue that Singapore's 2011 general election—in which the PAP secured victory with just over 60 percent of the popular vote, its lowest margin in years—marked a watershed moment in the decline of the Singapore consensus and an end to the era of unchallenged PAP dominance. In the "new normal" of this post-2011 climate, the contest of ideas and ideologies would be increasingly important, necessitating the rewriting of the relationship between the state and society. Yet in 2015, not long after the publication of this book, the PAP won the subsequent general election by a landslide, securing one of its strongest mandates in decades. Low and Vadaketh did foretell that the PAP's more responsive tones and

emphasis on material outcomes in the early post-2011 climate could swing some votes back to the PAP, but the magnitude of that swing is sufficiently large to question just how pervasive the demands for political pluralism really are in Singapore's "new normal." This outcome in no way limits the value of *Hard Choices*, but it does underscore how complex and unpredictable the politics of the small—and dare we say 'exceptional'—city-state really are.

*The Persian Gulf and Pacific Asia: From Indifference to Interdependence.* By CHRISTOPHER DAVIDSON. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010. 145 pp. \$54.35 (cloth).

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Christopher Davidson's book is a concise review of the increasingly interdependent and variegated relationship between the Persian Gulf and Pacific Asia. The book outlines the emergence of flourishing hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon trade relations between China, Japan, and South Korea and the six Persian Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates. In the span of merely 100 pages, Davidson effectively communicates a highly detailed history of economic and diplomatic interactions between the two regions. The book offers a primarily descriptive narrative, which—while abundant in empirical evidence—seldom moves past description to analysis or discussion.

Central to the book is the notion of an Eastwards reorientation of the Persian Gulf monarchies, enabled by the global shift in economic weight from the West to the East. To further this narrative, Davidson contrasts Western states' explicit pro-diversification positions and their proactive promotion of oil production outside the Middle East with the Pacific Asian states' apathy towards dependency on hydrocarbon imports from the Persian Gulf. Davidson then chronicles the effects of 9/11, arguing that it instilled Western mistrust towards Gulf sovereign wealth funds and led to the propagation of anti-Gulf sentiment and xenophobia by political commentators and mass media.

Davidson's contribution is more timely than he could have likely predicted at the time of writing. Mere months after the publication of this book, the Arab Spring reverberated throughout the region, rekindling the anxieties about regional stability of which Davidson takes stock. In tandem, environmental movements gained traction with campaigns for renewable energy, increasing pressure on Western governments already scrambling to diversify and reduce oil import dependency. The ensuing events of Libya, Syria, Iraq and, more recently, Yemen, exacerbated said existing anxieties.

Despite the somewhat accidental topicality of the book, Davidson nonetheless neglected to account for the effects of Iran's re-entry into global markets. While the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between P5 + 1 and Iran was reached only in 2015, negotiations had been underway since 2003. The UN Security Council had levied sanctions on Iran for years prior to the writing of this book, rendering Iran financially vulnerable and thereby facilitating leverage for Pacific Asian economies. Sanctions notwithstanding, Iran has historically had a larger oil supply and greater crude oil exports than five of the six Gulf monarchies.

No discussion of the Persian Gulf is complete without a discussion of present-day Persia—Iran—especially not a discussion that takes hydrocarbon trade as its starting point. Davidson justifies limiting the scope of his analysis to Gulf monarchies, instead of the Gulf as a whole, by arguing that existing literature lacks a middle ground between narrow bilateral analyses and broad studies of the entire Middle East. Putting aside, for the moment, the absence in his literature review of any discussion of existing findings, save a list of relevant titles, he does not justify