Neatly organised into five parts, and backed by a wealth of statistical data and qualitative evidence, the chapters are well-written and well-argued throughout. As such, it is hard to demur from the general conclusion that race-based affirmative action has outstayed its welcome. This book deserves to be required reading for all Malaysian policymakers.

NICHOLAS J. WHITE
Liverpool John Moores University

Myanmar

Opium and empire in Southeast Asia: Regulating consumption in British Burma
By ASHLEY WRIGHT
Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. 214. Appendix, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463414000757

Opium was a mainstay of colonial revenues throughout Asia during the high colonial age. The Dutch, French, Spanish, and, briefly, Americans all sold opium to their subjects through one state-led scheme or another. Britain was the key player in this vast enterprise. It sold opium to its own subjects in India and Southeast Asia and to legions of others in China and elsewhere. And it was largely British opium from the poppy fields of Bengal that flowed through government and private hands to smokers in the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and countless other markets in Asia. *Opium and empire in Southeast Asia* tells a small part of this large story. It traces how Britain went about selling opium to its subjects in British Burma and how its officials managed to square this practice with both their imperial priorities and their imperial consciences.

Opium was significant enough in the kingdom of Burma for King Bodawhpaya (r. 1782–1819) to declare it a capital crime. Yet, as the English East India Company moved into Arakan and Tenasserim — outlying territories of the kingdom's large *mandala* — after the First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824, among the first institutions it imported from British Bengal was the retail opium-licensing system, alongside similar revenue-farming arrangements for gambling and toddy shops. A certain amount of trial and error followed. A.D. Maingy, the first commissioner of Tenasserim, became an early critic of selling opium to native subjects. By the time the Company seized Lower Burma (Pegu) following the Second

Anglo-Burmese War, certain assumptions about opium were in place. In this discourse, it was perfectly all right to peddle opium to some colonial subjects, including Chinese, Indians, and certain local ethnic minorities such as the Shan and Kachin; no ill effects appeared to accompany the practice among these groups. But it was not all right to peddle opium to ethnic Burmans, whose childlike ways and self-indulgent habits made them prey to addiction, sloth, and crime. Britain's solution to this dilemma, never perfectly executed, was to regulate opium sales so that consumption among Burmans was curtailed, if not completely eliminated, and so that profits flowed freely from selling opium to the others. This strategy was the essence of Chief Commissioner Charles Aitchison's landmark 1881 memorandum, adopted as law in 1891.

Wright's book emphasises the recurring policy debates around this strategy — as Britain completed its conquest of Burma in 1885, executed the India-wide Royal Commission on Opium inquiry of the 1890s (in response to anti-opium sentiments in Britain), confronted rising international and much-resented American pressure in the twentieth century in one international opium conference after another, and as reformist Burmese nationalists agitated for prohibition from within the colony itself. To the end, as Wright amply demonstrates, colonial officials nimbly adopted the rhetoric of opium suppression even as they employed every strategy possible to prevent or delay the end of government opium sales. One reason why: In 1938 the London *Times* revealed that, in Burma, Britain was reaping 'a profit of about 700 percent from its opium transactions' (p. 146). By the time the British government finally did prohibit opium smoking in Burma, in 1943, it no longer had the power to do so: Burma had been occupied by Japan.

Alas, *Opium and empire in Southeast Asia* does not live up to its title. It dwells almost exclusively on the Burma case and marginally on the British-dominated opium trade to China. Even Britain's other Southeast Asian colonies are barely mentioned. The Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and the Philippines are virtually ignored. Wright has lost an opportunity here, I think, to show how Britain's management of opium in Burma was part of a wider pattern of colonial behaviour and to examine the degree to which its internal deliberations and everyday practices mirrored or diverged from those of others. (The practice of selling opium to some ethnic groups and not to others was not limited to Burma, for example.)

Wright's book is also narrow in other ways. Because of its focus on policy deliberations, we learn little about the sociology, demography, and political economy of the opium trade and opium consumption in colonial Burma. Here and there are flashes of specificity — as in the 1903–04 ethnic

breakdown of 91 opium-selling licensees in Lower Burma, revealing 44 Chinese, 16 Europeans/Eurasians, 8 Burmese, 4 Armenians and so on (p. 100) — but for the most part, the socioeconomic aspects of opium in Burma remain vague. As does Burma itself. We encounter almost nothing about the remarkable transformation of the colony as described in Michael Adas's classic study, *The Burma Delta: Economic development and social change on an Asian rice frontier, 1852–1941*, a book not listed in Wright's bibliography. Moreover, *Opium and empire* has no maps and no glossary. Maddeningly, certain Anglo-Indian or Burmese words are used without definition, as in 'by 1904, consumption was at the record high, of 79,428 *seers*' and 'an account of the *satra* from the period between 1449 and 1568' (pp. 64, 82). *Seers*? *Satra*? Please help! These sorts of flaws, trivial as they may seem, should be absent in a well-edited scholarly book.

Still, Wright has explored the colonial archives and contemporary English-language sources deeply. The strength of her book is its attention to the debates among British officials in the evolution of colonial opium policies. She stresses the efforts of reform-minded officials such as Maingy and Aitchison and the prescient Donald Smeaton, who in 1904 proposed substituting fruits and vegetables for opium poppies and providing farm-to-market railroads to encourage Shans and Kachins to grow alternative crops. Wright's book illustrates the important point that colonial policies arose from arguments in which a range of voices were consulted and heard, and in which idealism and benevolence were weighed against the quest for revenue, order, and power. She rightly places these debates within Britain's larger civilising mission, in which both sides felt entitled to intervene in the 'the intimate reaches of people's lives' (p. 2).

JAMES R. RUSH
Arizona State University

Singapore

Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300–1800
By JOHN N. MIKSIC
Singapore: NUS Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 491. Maps, Illustrations, Images, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463414000769

The precolonial history of Singapore is an area of wilful ignorance and self-denial among many residents and scholars of the nation-state.