



defined by the nation-state, of who a model Singaporean should be. In doing so, the author highlights how a truly authentic Singapore can be discerned from the ‘deep sound’(pp. 14–18)—the multiple assemblages of music-making, social activities, instruments and spaces of social interaction—produced and expressed by its citizens.

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Singapore

Singapore, Chinese migration and the making of the British Empire, 1819–67

By STAN NEAL

Woodbridge: Boydell, 2019. Pp. 181. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463423000176

This book provides a very useful link between Chinese migration to Singapore, impressions of the Chinese by British government officials and merchants, and the movements of Chinese labour across the British Empire between the establishment of a trading post by the East India Company in Singapore in 1819 and the transfer of Singapore to the Colonial Office in 1867. Historians have generally studied Chinese migration outside the boundaries of enquiries into British policy, except for issues of maintaining order and control. Stan Neal shows convincingly that British monitoring of Chinese migration went beyond statistics and law and order, and that the British actively promoted the use of Chinese labour across the Empire after observing what they considered to be the benefits of having both Chinese labour and traders in Singapore. Colonial British observers exuded confidence regarding the business skills and industriousness of both groups of Chinese migrants, but were quick to condemn what they believed were vices associated with the community—gambling and the consumption of drugs.

The book is divided into five chapters, seamlessly linked by the central issue of race, or more precisely, British views of the Chinese. A constant theme is how policy was shaped by British impressions of the Chinese in Singapore, leading to the promotion of Chinese labour across the empire. Chapter 1 explores ‘The Singapore model’, arguing that the British, having observed them in Singapore, saw the economic benefits of Chinese business skills and labour elsewhere. Interestingly, historians of overseas Chinese history also divided the community into two ‘classes’—business (*shang*) and labour (*gong*). While both ‘classes’ worked to eke out a living in colonial Singapore, the British administration looked into maintaining law and order, such as suppressing secret societies and establishing a Chinese Protectorate. The author also notes that British officials viewed local people through racial stereotypes such as ‘laziness’. Slavery was justified, as local ‘natives’ were deemed unable to work in European-owned plantations.

Chapter 2 takes a closer look at British views of the Chinese character based on race, economics and colonisation in Singapore, a process which continued from the first contact between the McCartney Mission to the Qing Empire in 1793 through

to the events leading to the Opium War (1839–42). The British regarded Chinese emigration as an act of liberation against the despotic Qing Empire. The Chinese were seen as a panacea for labour shortages in the Empire after the ban on slavery. Chapter 3 discusses the ‘stimulated interest’ in Chinese labour through plans to use Chinese migrant workers in Assam, Ceylon, Mauritius and the West Indies in the 1830s and 1840s. Chinese labour was welcomed over Indian migrants. Chapter 4 explains the failure to increase the number of Chinese migrants in Australia due to Australian labour concerns over threats to their jobs. Chapter 5 shows how the opening up of Hong Kong and Singapore in particular facilitated Chinese mass migration out of the Qing Empire.

This book is an important study of the British Empire’s plans to expand economically, not with British capital, but through Chinese labour. British officials and merchants used their experiences in Singapore and Qing China to paint a positive image of the Chinese in order to promote the view that the Chinese made excellent workers, so long as they kept away from vices. Therefore, Singapore became a model for the rest of the empire as Chinese labour was promoted in the colonies. Chinese labour was touted as a solution to what the British observers considered to be the ‘lazy’ native population of the colonies. Australia, as a settler colony of Whites from Britain, rejected Chinese labour out of working-class concerns that their jobs would be threatened by Chinese mass migration. The book clearly shows that to the British Empire, Chinese labour was acceptable so long as it enriched the coffers of empire and did not threaten jobs held by British (or White) workers. Race played a key role in maintaining the empire, and this book shows how racial stereotypes were used to justify the need for Chinese labourers when it benefited the British. This book is highly recommended for anyone keen on early Singapore colonial history and the study of British impressions of the ‘Chinese character’.

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Thailand

More than rural: Textures of Thailand’s agrarian transformation

By JONATHAN RIGG

Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2019. Pp. 300. Figures, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463423000140

Thailand is a good place to hone your scepticism about grand narratives of progress. Whether the story is about urbanisation, industrialisation, democratisation or secularisation, Thailand demonstrates that the pathways to the present—let alone the future—are meandering and unpredictable. A good number of Thai society’s ‘twists and turns’ (p. 11) are explored in Jonathan Rigg’s important book on rural Thailand. As the subtitle suggests, his interests lie as much with the ‘textures of Thailand’s agrarian transformation’ as with its trajectories. In this pursuit he is