invaluable because of the numerous different European transcriptions of Chinese names.

The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas offers a wealth of well-researched information, not only on historical events but also on very up to date issues, like secret (or illegal emigration), and new migration patterns, e.g. middle class Taiwanese moving their families to Western countries. The book's lavish design is reminiscent of a coffee-table book, however, the presentation of the many different topics is generally complete and balanced – doubtless thanks to the many noted contributors. Nevertheless, there is a slight tendency to deconstruct negative clichés of the ethnic Chinese Overseas and construct positive ones. This tendency probably reflects the role of the Chinese Heritage Centre as publishing institution, which is partly financed by large Southeast Asian companies who may have an interest in improving the image of ethnic Chinese in the region.

Christine Winkelmann

CHERIAN GEORGE, *Singapore. The Air-Conditioned Nation. Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control 1990–2000*. Singapore: Landmark Books, 2000. 223 pages, S$ 20.50. ISBN 981-3065-46-X

This is an interesting and well written collection of 'essays' on the state of Singaporean politics and society after more than 40 years of one-party rule and successful economic development. As the most Westernized of all Asian cities, Singapore no doubt has interesting lessons to teach, but also important experiences to draw on for its own future.

The success story is a familiar tale. Singapore, which since the 1960s could have gone the way of Calcutta or Manila, with a per capita income of S$ 37,000 (2000) is second in Asia only to Japan. Reflecting its leftwing origins, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has opted for a middle class oriented distribution of wealth. A key element is majority home ownership in mostly upgraded housing estates, with low taxation, self financed pensions and only minimal social welfare (p. 91). With zero tolerance on corruption – a lesson learned from the Communists in the 1960s – and an emphasis on meritocracy in the public service, governance is good (p. 74), perhaps too good. According to Premier Goh, the government has to act as the custodian of its people's long-term interests – even if the citizens see these differently. Hence there was a thorough clean-up and relocation of all cottage industries, street hawkers and farmsteads following rather illiberal land acquisition policies (p. 19). Public satisfaction is undoubtedly high. The pursuit of material comforts (last but not least the air-con, which Lee Kuan Yew sees as decisive to enable tropical countries to catch up with Western productivity levels) is well taken care of (p. 11). For more than half a century, Lee and his PAP never lost an election. In fact, for some 16 years there were not even any opposition MPs in parliament. Elections were formally free but never fair, as the government never took any chances. According to a quoted US State Department report (though it may be difficult to see US presidential and senatorial elections as a guide for fairness) there was intimidation of the opposition, limiting of legitimate political discourse and action and ma-

nipulation of the electoral framework. A legal bureaucratic machine is set in motion against opposition candidates, like Jeyaretnam, Dr Chee, or "Chinese chauvinists" whom the government considers dangerous. An avalanche of civil defamation suits deters others effectively (p. 84).

Given the current climate of repressive laws in the EU and the US, perhaps Singapore is a step ahead in managing a multicultural and multiracial immigrant society with limited civic freedoms and draconian punishments. Underlying is George's unanswered question: Can racial divisions never be bridged, only managed? (p. 159).

To be fair, as a colonial heritage Singapore (and Malaysia) inherited a Communist insurrection and a series of repressive laws, which were never repealed:

Foremost, the Internal Security Act, which allows for detention without trial and was originally aimed at Marxist subversives (p. 149). Then limitations on the freedom of expression: press licenses, which can be revoked any time (and could ruin a publishing company), an Official Secrets Act with zero tolerance of leaks, strict libel laws, which protect the reputation of officials (p. 65). The restrictions were further perfected by a "Religious Harmony Act", which forbids religious groups to act politically or against the government (p. 42). The "Newspaper and Printing Presses Act" allows the restriction of foreign newspapers which pay insufficient respect to the government (notoriously subversive papers like *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *The Far Eastern Economic Review* fell foul of these provisions). The logic is that the elected government which expresses the will of the people needs to be protected from the unelected press – the commercial interests of their owners, and the hybris or prejudiced ideologies of the journalists (p. 69). The rationale for self-censorship is that stories must be respectful of the country's rulers – ridicule or cartoons are not permitted! (p. 71). Internet censorship was introduced in 1996. It attempted to block out the usual taboos:

- public security, national defense interests,
- subversion of public confidence in the government and in the judicial institutions,
- racial or religious defamation,
- sexual promiscuity (p. 134).

In 1998, a "Film Act" barred all "party political films" (p. 43), and in 2000, foreign funding of political organizations was prohibited. These provisions obviously do not create a repressive atmosphere or gulags for political prisoners, but they indicate the wide range of discretionary powers available to the government, which is expected to use them only with due consideration.

According to George the powerful discretionary powers of the executive left the Singaporean people in a "state of resigned acquiescence" (p. 22). There was a government-generated suspicion of any spontaneous citizens' initiative, e.g. Malayan Nature Society, whose idea of protecting natural habitats collided with the government's idea of trimmed parks and golf courses (p. 140). There was also Nanyang University, Singapore's Chinese-speaking university, financed by the Chinese-speaking community, including wealthy local businessmen, and suspected first of creating communist subversives and later of linguistic misfits unsuitable for the cosmopolitan labour market. It was hence forcefully merged with the English-speaking National University in 1980 (p. 111). Citizens are seen as principally unreliable:

addicted to welfarism, (ethnic) communalism and individualism. Outside Singapore the threat of communist insurgencies has been replaced by potentially militant Islamist fundamentalism (p. 195).

As civic participation is discouraged, and the young PAP cadres are untrained in communication and lack leadership qualities, the party itself faces the costs of its inarticulate depolitization. More generally, George considers that this depoliticization has discouraged civic minded social behaviour and tended to reward individualist egoism. No amount of social engineering and exhortation will be able to undo these attitudinal changes (p. 116).

Obviously the U.S. inspired Western human rights agitation against Singapore's residual authoritarianism has backfired (p. 49). Through good governance and economic success the government was able to demonstrate that its emphasis on economic and social rights and its professed "Asian values" focussing on family self-reliance, educational achievement and public morality were in fact genuine – an undoubtedly rare occurrence in the region.

Having been a political reporter with *Straits Times* throughout the entire decade of Goh Chok Tong's prime ministership with its hesitant liberalization, George knows what he is writing about. He does so with great clarity, which makes the book useful also for those readers not well versed in the arcane technicalities of the politics and administration of the island state. His style is polite and well-balanced throughout, yet he is also firm in expressing his disagreement with a lengthy range of policy issues pursued by the government.

He has thereby obviously escaped the censorship and its favourite tool of defamation suits. With this successful publication George proves himself an eloquent advocate of a more meaningful public debate in Singapore.

Albrecht Rothacher

R.J. MAY, *State and Society in Papua New Guinea. The First Twenty-Five Years*. Adelaide: Crawford House, 2001. xi, 445 pages, A$ 49,95. ISBN 1-86333-204-9

In September 2000 Papua New Guinea (PNG) celebrated its silver jubilee as an independent state. The volume has been put together to mark this occasion. It comprises 17 papers written – or published – between 1971 and 1998 to address issues of central political concern. The author Ron James May, an economist by profession, is a senior fellow at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra. Moreover, he is the nestor of political research on PNG in Papua New Guinea itself and in Australia.

After a foreword by the first PNG Prime Minister (and senior minister in subsequent governments) Sir Michael Somare, May presents a brief overview of PNG's development since 1975 and examines some of the key issues facing the country at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In his view PNG performed well in its first decade. It achieved a smooth transition and enjoyed a high degree of economic and political progress. Since the mid-1980s several adverse developments have