

Eddie Tay, *Colony, Nation, and Globalisation: Not at Home in Singaporean and Malaysian Literature* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011)

Eddie Tay's first academic monograph, *Colony, Nation, and Globalisation: Not at Home in Singaporean and Malaysian Literature*, provides a new voice within studies of Anglophone Southeast Asian literature. Tay's study of Singaporean and Malaysian literature also draws necessary attention to the understudied Southeast Asian region for those working in postcolonial studies. By examining themes that 'articulate a pervasive uneasiness that attends to the notion of home' (1), Tay's book attempts to elucidate how colonialism, nation-state formation and globalisation affect identity formation in the contexts of Singapore and Malaysia. His choices of primary texts span from the late nineteenth century to early twenty-first – which alone should indicate the ambitious scope of his project. Tay's examination of a theme through over a century's worth of Anglophone works in Singapore and Malaysia demonstrates his investment in marking a literary tradition.

The monograph is organized chronologically and is thus divided into three parts – with three chapters per part. Part I, 'Colony: British Malaya', looks at colonial anxieties as expressed through late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century texts. In Chapter One, Tay argues that the trope of amok in Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* is a result of colonialists not feeling at home. Such a sentiment 'exceeds this discursive frame [of colonialist discourse], emerging as a trope that marks the coloniser's anxiety regarding the extent of control he has over the natives' (29). Tay's point here is a familiar one to those who study colonial culture, but a necessary one nonetheless. Chapter Two examines how the travel writings of Isabella Bird, Emily Innes, and Florence Caddy 'are a response to the condition of being not-at-home in that there is an attempt to create through their writings an environment that is hospitable to colonial enterprise' (32). While Tay might be overstating that Innes' work 'runs contrary to Sara Mill's argument' (40), the chapter provides an interesting example of gendered colonial anxieties and their relationship to notions of home. The last chapter of Part I examines works of W. Somerset Maugham and Anthony Burgess to mark the end of the colonial era in Malaya and explore themes of what he calls 'the exhaustion of colonial romance' (45) – a rather nice and useful formulation. Analyses of such authors provide an appropriate arc to Part I by marking the ending of the colonial era and beginnings of decolonisation and independence – conditions that were especially not hospitable to colonialist notions of home.

The fourth chapter, which turns to Lee Kok Liang's *London Does not Belong to Me* and 'Return to Malaya' to examine postcolonial understandings of home in relation to the metropole, opens up Part II, 'Nations: Malaya, Singapore, and Malaysia.' Through his examination of Lee's texts, Tay shows how the 'return' to the metropole facilitates a 'return to a vision of Malaya and home and nation' (75). Chapter Five compares poems of Edwin Thumboo, Alfian Sa'at and a short story by Karim Raslan to discuss how the configuration of ethnicity, nationhood, and tradition culminate in a strong ambivalence towards state-sponsored nationalism. Tay rounds off Part II by looking at how novels of Philip Jeyaretnam and Gopal Baratham critique the state through themes of responsibility and commitment. Tay's voice seems rather hesitant at the end of this chapter when he writes: 'If one is to draw a conclusion regarding what literature in Singapore can be responsible for, it will be an ambivalent conclusion bearing the syntax of 'yes, ... but'

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(106). This probably could be said of most literatures. If Tay decides to continue the work from this chapter, his analyses might benefit from the work of Derrida, Foucault, and Adorno who all explore the ethical complexities of responsibility and (political) commitment.

The last section of the book 'Globalisation: Home is Elsewhere' begins with Tay's claim that K.S. Maniam's novels 'are interesting because they draw from the vocabulary of diaspora to explore the condition of internal exile' (110) and thus enables the notion of what Tay calls the 'post-diasporic imagination' (110). I am not convinced of the theoretical purchase of marking temporality in diaspora nor am I convinced that the term shows how 'cultural memory has to be reworked even as one stays in place' (110) in a way that differs from concerns that already exist in diaspora studies. Despite these reservations, Tay does not develop the term or engage with current debates enough in this ten page chapter and I look forward to the time when he will be able to give himself more room to refine his theorisation. When Tay claims that 'globalisation brings into intimate contact people from different localities' (132) in Chapter Eight where he examines *Mammon Inc.* and *Alien Asian*, it would help to know how 'globalization' can be a more (or less) productive term than (im)migration or diaspora. In other words, some more theoretical precision and engagement with the debates over terminology would refine his claims and readings. Moreover, consideration of Asian American literature and history – American minority discourses that undoubtedly overdetermine Singaporean subjectivity in both novels – seem to be curiously missing. The monograph finishes with readings of three transnational literary works by Tash Aw, Vyvyane Loh, and Lau Siew Mei to support Tay's claim that such works provide alternative voices of the nation from outside of it. Tay ultimately favors Lau's ability to provide a 'revisionist momentum [that] subverts the reification of history and the current nationalist discourse in Singapore' (150).

Overall, while Part I makes interesting points about colonial culture and themes of (un)homeliness, it is not entirely clear how examining the anxieties surrounding notions of home in colonialist/settler literature of Malaya appropriately transitions into analyses of Singaporean and Malaysian literatures written by (post)colonial subjects. The political, ideological, and cultural underpinnings and audiences of these literatures are quite different; by focusing on similar themes in these two categories of work without commenting on such differences evacuates the analysis of the theme of home and not-at-home of its significance.

Though Tay's ambition is laudable, the scope and aims of the project is simply too large to fit within 150 pages. Because the monograph is spread across so many texts, genres, authors, time periods, histories, and critical terms, the analysis and argumentation feels rather thin in places. Nonetheless, Tay shows the richness of Singaporean and Malaysian literature and provides necessary direction for future work. His knowledge and ability to historically and politically contextualize each text is impressive and particularly useful for readers who are unfamiliar with Singaporean and Malaysian history and literary production. Moreover, the importance of providing another critical voice within the studies of Anglophone Southeast Asian literatures cannot be underscored enough. Tay's contribution is a productive one and offers important material for future scholarship.

Cheryl Narumi Naruse

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