with Shiva providing a divine precedent: thus, "combined man/woman is a powerful theme of Hindu" religion, which has not only accommodated but also empowered the hijras (p. 20). Indeed, the hijras' powers to bless and to curse are taken "seriously" by local folk, and while they are teased, their ritual and economic ability to carve out a specialized niche in India is such that impersonators have emerged to compete with them. To prove their authenticity, the audience may ask to see their genitals; yet such exposure causes women to cover their eyes and men to be impotent (p. 6).

To qualify as a hijra, one must be hermaphroditic or an impotent male; however, only castration is the *dharm* sufficient to embody the ritual role. "Real" hijras must also dress in female clothing, wear jewelry and long hair, dance and caricature female sexuality, bestow blessings in the name of Mata, the mother goddess, and claim intersexed infants for the hijras. Thus, one can be "born hijra" (hermaphrodite), or "made hijra" (eunuch). Though the British and the present government have long criminalized castration, this has not eliminated the hijra. In this book, a detailed account of the castration ritual, which is performed by midwives and symbolically modeled on 40 days' birth seclusion, effectively establishes the liminal status of these gender-transformed beings.

Hijras function as a caste. They form household communal units with gurus and followers. The fictive kinship ties and extensive social networks Nanda describes reveal how the hijras can leave their natal families and create a "culture." Prostitution with male clients is a prominent mode of work for them. Members of all castes are welcome; purity and pollution rules are not followed. One study showed that 50% of hijras came from the untouchable category. Nanda's hijras were of lower and middle caste. Though she does not pursue the point, her data suggest that becoming a hijra is more adaptive for lower castes. Apparently, Brahman genitals are too valuable to cut off.

The paradoxes of Indian hijras are striking and in subsequent study deserve more emphasis. They demasculate themselves, but bestow fertility (p. 4); they are ascetic, but engage in sex—many function as professional prostitutes; they are not "homosexual," but engage in homoerotic practices (p. 14); they appeal to Hinduism, but have "a bias in favor of Islam" (p. 42); and they can bless, but also spoil, fertility.

Hijras challenge Western conceptions of immutable gender. Nanda's analysis of this issue is enlightened but problematical. Hijras claim to be neither man nor woman, yet the personal pronoun "she" is adopted by them, and the author, in the narrative voice. Their gender category is defined primarily by absence: the absence of male potency, followed by castration; the absence of menstruation and childbearing (p. 18). To say that hijras are "nonman" (p. 116) is emically important, but this analytically begs the question: Is their "gender identity" hijra-like, not masculine or feminine? Nanda is right to avoid the ethnocentric pitfalls of disagreeing with her informants. The distinctive flavor of Indian culture and its ambivalence to them causes us to wonder about the integrity of the hijras as a third gender. Ultimately, the hijras' ritual role is a "magnet" attracting many kinds of people to their fold. Serena Nanda is to be congratulated on humanizing their condition and for forcing us to consider further the nexus of nature and culture in gender.

Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology. *Tania Li.* East Asian Social Science Monographs. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 223 pp. $29.95 (cloth).

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This is the first significant ethnography of Singapore Malays in almost 30 years, since Djamour's *Malay Kinship and Marriage* (Athlone Press, 1959), written at a time when Singapore was still part of Malaya. Now Singapore is independent, and the Malays are a numerical and political minority, occupying what is essentially a Chinese city-state. To give shape to her ethnography, Li adopts the theme of the interrelationship between political and material conditions at the national level and daily social and cultural activities in households and local communities. A basic assumption is that "culture" is a product of a constant process of interaction between the two levels rather than a fixed tradition and is as much subject to a "structuring" from above as to an anchorage in the past.

Following the author's intellectual tutelage under Alan Macfarlane, the burden of her argument is that the family and domestic unit is a sensitive and informative barometer of wider economic and social conditions. This section is enriched by references to recent developments in kinship and gift exchange theory. Li convincingly illustrates the imperfect boundaries between the expression of kinship sentiments through gift giving and caring *(kasehan)* and the tendency toward the commodification of

these gifts and of the personal relationships they stand for, leading to ambivalence and brittleness in family relations. This is reflected in low rates of mutual dependability, in wage sharing, and in other cooperative economic enterprises. Unfortunately, Li neglects to extend this analysis to marriage exchanges or dowries.

The perceived discrepancy in economic success between Malays and Chinese since 1959 has popularly been attributed to cultural factors. Li reexamines this assumption in a comparison of Chinese culture and kinship and also relates Malay economic performance to state policies, especially education and housing. In one concession to the cultural generalization, however, Li attributes the inferior Malay record in entrepreneurship largely to the individualistic character of Malay kinship. The cultural construction of the Chinese family, on the other hand, involves a greater sense of loyalty and obligation, including by women, who in a wage economy must also now choose between serving parents and parents-in-law, as patrilineality yields to a more encompassing bilaterality. The commitments particularly benefit the Chinese in corporate business enterprises, and in wage-sharing strategies. Under common constraints of government and other policies, however, a growing convergence between Malay and Chinese domestic arrangements is occurring. Li also demonstrates that class mobility by Malays leads to changes in Malay cultural style, again showing the flexibility of "culture" in action, and its transformation under changing patterns of economic production, although she makes no reference to the growing literature on class and culture.

Finally, Li argues that the sometimes false perceptions of their culture, by Malays and non-Malays alike, have become part of a received and self-reproducing ideology in Singapore society. Culture reflects ethnic and class boundaries, which in turn reinforce many of Singapore's national policies and institutions, further perpetuating these cultural myths. This volume represents a largely successful attempt to bring together the micro- and the macrolevels of a complex social system, without sacrificing the immediacy of the ethnographic approach.

The reader familiar with the local scene might have expected more attention to Islam and religious values, and also to subethnic differences as variables in Malay "culture." Overall, this publication fills a void in Singapore ethnography and, with its comparative perspective, provides a sense of the position of the Singapore Malays in a wider Southeast Asian world. It is sadly marred by some serious typesetting problems, obscuring all of pages 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, and 25, but otherwise is certainly required reading for any scholar of the region or of kinship in general.

Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm. *Shelly Errington.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989. 344 pp. $35.00 (cloth).

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The central issue of Errington's book is "how to reconcile the study of meaning with the study of 'politics' " (p. 5). Criticizing Marxists for presuming that actors do not know their real interests (false consciousness), and utilitarians for presuming that actors everywhere operate as rational, calculating maximizers, Errington takes seriously the goals actors say they are trying to obtain.

Toluwu, the people of the historic kingdom of Luwu in South Sulawesi, understand power as potency, a genderless cosmic energy. The state there restricts access to potency, which is above all *centered* power, concentrated in the figure of the ruler, and insistently hierarchical. Around and below the ruler, nobles are ranked by their degree of "white blood," forming the centers of their own circles of kin and clients. Errington sees "no ideological space for 'equals' " in Luwu (p. 140). Interaction is always a contest for place, and the more nearly two persons are peers, the more heated the contest. Constantly reading the signs of posture and response in others, Toluwu rise at the slightest insult to defend or reassert their *siri'* (honor/shame). The number of followers who show up to work at ceremonies demonstrates a sponsor's power, but also tests it. Without actually moving or saying very much, the sponsors must squelch the tensions over *siri'* that arise during the event.

Errington ventures far afield of "politics," narrowly construed, into concepts about bodies and houses, the potency of family heirlooms and the ruler himself as a talisman of the polity, genealogies and the politics of remembering them, teknonyms and titles, and marriages with close cousins to concentrate "white blood" or with distant ones to "rope back" kin toward a high center. She arranges these diverse topics to elucidate both the centripetal, hierarchical ideal, and the inevitable centrifugal tendencies undermining it, specifically, status competition between peers. A