

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SINGAPORE LEGAL SYSTEM. By HELENA CHAN.  
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S\$18.00]

A BOOK describing the legal system of Singapore is long overdue. We have been an independent nation for over 21 years, yet there is not a single text that one can recommend to the newcomer to give an overview of the legal system. It is particularly embarrassing for the Law Faculty to conduct a course on the Legal System of Singapore without being in a position to prescribe any book for students' preliminary reading. Happily that has all changed with the publication of Helena Chan's book.

The book is divided into five chapters covering the legal history of Singapore, sources of law, the structure of government, legal institutions and civil and criminal procedure. A sixth chapter is devoted to legal culture and the author's views on the future development of the law.

Chapter 1 traces the history of Singapore from the foundation of Raffles' factory until the present day. One is taken quickly through 150 years of political development. Perhaps one minor criticism is that the author makes reference exclusively to secondary texts by writers such as Hall, Mills and Turnbull, who are historians not lawyers. A lawyer or law student may find citation of the actual treaties and statutes that affected the constitutional status of Singapore more valuable. In a capsule work such as this, footnotes are important to give the reader some lead for further research. The rest of the chapter deals with the historical and legislative reception of English law. The discussion is general and not exhaustive. The footnotes here are adequate for the student who requires more detail to research the matter further.

The second chapter discusses the sources of Singapore law. The author here describes the Constitution and statutes. There is a good summary of the sources of legislation possibly applying to Singapore, which includes not only Acts of the Parliament of Singapore but also legislation from India, England and Malaysia. This is followed by a fairly long portion on the doctrine of *stare decisis*. The chapter ends with a brief mention of custom.

Chapter 3 deals with the structure of government. This chapter is a description mainly of the executive and legislative branches. The judiciary is dealt with in Chapter 4 which describes Singapore's legal institutions. Among these is classed the Attorney-General, who is actually provided for in the Constitution under the Executive. However, the author makes the legitimate point that the Attorney-General is a "key legal institution" (one wonders how he would react to being considered an institution) and therefore should be dealt with together with the judiciary and the profession.

The longest chapter in the book is Chapter 4 which concerns the legal institutions. The first part of this chapter is devoted to a description of the various courts in Singapore and their various jurisdictions. Regrettably there is no reference to other important judicial bodies like the Industrial Arbitration Court and the military courts. These do play a significant, though low-key, role in the legal system and perhaps deserve more attention than they usually get. The second part of this chapter is devoted to a description of the legal profession and the legal (and judicial) service. The modes of entry into the profession are described and there is a thumb-nail sketch of the duties of advocates and solicitors. Unfortunately, through no fault of the author's, the very significant amendments introduced by the Legal Profession (Amendment) Act 1986 were not dealt with. The description of the disciplinary procedure on pp.90-92 is therefore out of date. The chapter is rounded off with a description of the Attorney-General's functions and those of the major law enforcement agencies.

Chapter 5 contains a potted summary of criminal and civil procedure.

Needless to say topics of such width cannot be covered in any great depth in such a slim tome, but the author does a good job in summarizing the main points for the reader. A major letdown is the index. This is a mere

two pages long and of such generality as to be practically useless. Even in an introductory book one might perhaps expect a better index. Having said that however, this is a useful book for the student and the newcomer to the legal system. It more than adequately fulfils the author's stated aim of providing a short general introduction to Singapore's Legal System, All in all, a book worth reading.

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