

Book Review: Professionals at the Crossroads in Singapore Author: **Linda Low**

Low, L. (1996). *Professionals at the Crossroads in Singapore*, Times Academic Press, Singapore.

REVIEWED BY: KATHLEEN M. CAMPBELL

In this book, Professor Linda Low has examined professionals, those people whose careers are more vocations, or "callings", than jobs. Low has defined professionals as individuals whose careers require extensive training, who engage in intellectual work rather than physical labor, who provide important services to society, who have a great deal of autonomy in their work, and most importantly, who perform services that carry with them a solemn moral responsibility.

Low has further divided professionals into two classes: consulting professionals (whose careers are entrepreneurial in many ways) and scholarly professionals (those who have "no personal clients and work for a salary"). This dichotomy is necessary as Professor Low organizes her book around several themes which are most appropriate in discussing consulting professionals. These themes include the question of how applicable conventional economic criteria are to professional practice; the ethical dilemmas faced by professionals; and the conundrum of wedding professionalism with profitability. Low also ponders other questions in the Singaporean political and economic context: How will professionals fare in "the next lap" of Singapore's economic growth? Will professionals be willing and able to take up the government's call to market their services abroad? How will the most qualified people be encouraged to join the professional ranks? How many professionals does Singapore need? How much government intervention is necessary to ensure the "correct" number of professionals?

After introducing us to the economic, philosophical and political questions under scrutiny, Low takes an in depth look at four professions in Singapore: medical doctors, lawyers, architects and engineers. The first two groups fit her model and allow her to explore her questions fully. However, two latter groups are something of a strain for the model. Architects are less than a perfect fit because it is more difficult to argue that the solemn moral responsibility borne by this group is equal to that carried by doctors and lawyers. Low herself acknowledges this when she states that poorly designed buildings may be a loss for a society but they do not appear to present a moral problem. Engineers present a different problem. As Low indicates, most engineers are less specialized and less entrepreneurial in the practice of their profession than the definition of "consulting professionals" would ...

Kathleen M. Campbell

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