THE MAKING OF SINGAPORE AS AN ASIAN REGIONAL CORRIDOR

HISTORICITY, TRADE, AND DIASPORA

Edited by
Hong Liu, Cheun Hoe Yow, and Huimei Zhang

The Making of Singapore as an Asian Regional Corridor

Liu, Yow, Zhang and the contributors examine Singapore's significance as an Asian Regional Corridor and provide a new perspective on interpreting Singapore's important position in the Asian region and its role as a bridge connecting Asia to the world and within the Asian region.

The book unfolds from three interconnected perspectives: historicity, trade, and diaspora, examining Singapore as an Asian regional corridor and its pivotal role in global political, economic, and social developments. It also delves into current mobility trends and future challenges, contributing to a nuanced understanding of Singapore's and Southeast Asia's uncertain trajectory and offers a unique perspective that collectively illuminates the diverse dimensions of Singapore's influence and engagement in the global stage.

This book is a valuable resource for scholars and students of Southeast Asian studies including political, economic, and cultural studies and those interested in Singapore's development and its regional role in Asia. It would also be of interest to those conducting comparative research on Global Asia and its interactions with the world.

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Historicity, Trade, and Diaspora

Edited by Hong Liu, Cheun Hoe Yow, and Huimei Zhang

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Introduction

Historicity, Trade, and Diaspora in the Making of Singapore as an Asian Regional Corridor: An Introduction

Hong Liu, Cheun Hoe Yow, and Huimei Zhang

The year 2019 marked Singapore's bicentennial commemoration of its founding. While the arrival of Stamford Raffles in 1819 on the small island undoubtedly shaped the trajectory of Singapore, its history extends far beyond this date, reaching back to the 13th century when it had already begun engaging in trade with China and the surrounding region.[1]

Singapore occupies a geographically important location in the Asian region. It is strategically situated at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, serving as a geographical corridor between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Its position alongside the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest and most strategically important maritime routes, has facilitated its establishment as a crucial hub for global trade and transportation. Located at the crossroads of the East and the West, Singapore connects major economies across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East and emerges as a prosperous free port known for its diverse population and bustling economy. Histories of Singapore have consistently recognised the significance of global and regional trade, migration, cultural flows, and the maritime infrastructures that had greatly facilitated these exchanges in shaping the country's development up to its independence in 1965 (see, for example, Liu and Wong 2004; Lee 2008; Turnbull 2009; Perry 2017; Kwa and Kua 2019; Liu and Zhang 2020).

Over the past two centuries, Singapore has undergone remarkable transformations, evolving from a small fishing village to a thriving global metropolis. The narrative of Singapore's industrialisation and its economic and social transformation after 1959 has focused on restructuring its internal landscapes, educational systems, finance, economy, politics, and culture. These are essential for addressing the challenges of economic and political survival as an independent nation-state (Lee 2000; Chong 2010; Calder 2016). The successful model of Singapore's economic development and social governance has been closely studied and sometimes imitated by other countries in the region, thus creating the nation-state's soft power and influences well beyond its national boundaries (see, for example, Liu and Wang 2018, 2021; Lee, Liu, and Cao 2025).

When discussing Singapore as an Asian regional corridor, the components of global connectivity and centralised points of processing and redistribution are

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critical. These elements create integrated systems that drive economic growth, cultural exchange, and technological advancement. As such, Singapore's role as a hub constitutes a key focus of this book. In examining the main factors that have contributed to Singapore's emergence as an Asian regional corridor, three key dimensions stand out: historicity, trade, and diaspora.

Singapore's history since 1819—and the several centuries predated this—has been characterised by a mixture of various forces in contributing to the island's emergence as a regional hub, including trade (not just as flows of commodities but the formation and flourishing of economic organisations and laws associated with the trade), migration from the region and beyond, which in turn led to the establishment of diasporic communities, especially of the Chinese origin, which account for approximately 75 percent of the country's population since 1965. This influx of immigrants fostered a multicultural environment where diverse cultures merged and interacted. As such, the three key dimensions—historicity, trade, and diaspora—have shaped Singapore into the global financial hub as it is today that has been often presented from a nation-state perspective. Seeking to understand and interpret their respective roles both individually and collectively has been a main agenda in shaping this volume and the related academic activities.

To explore the above themes from transnational and interdisciplinary perspectives, between 2018 and 2024, a research team led by Hong Liu organised a series of academic conferences, public lectures and dialogue sessions that brought together policy makers and scholars from Southeast Asia, China, Japan, South Korea, and beyond. These conferences aimed to examine Singapore's multifaceted transformations during different historical stages over the past 200 years. This book represents one of the major outcomes from these transnational and interdisciplinary collaborations.

This book consists of three interconnected sections, which are organised into eight chapters.

The first section, "**Historicity and Network**," includes three chapters. The authors in this section examine Singapore's historical development as a regional and global hub. They explore how Singapore's strategic location, its role in entrepôt trade, and its economic connections during various historical periods contributed to its emergence as a corridor for commerce and interaction. These discussions highlight Singapore's adaptability to shifting geopolitical and economic landscapes and its ability to leverage its position to facilitate trade, foster industrialisation, and navigate complex international relationships, which have collectively shaped its identity as a dynamic trading hub.

The first chapter, by Danny Tze Ken Wong, "**Singapore in the History of British North Borneo—An Examination of Singapore as Centre to the Region**," examines North Borneo's ties with Singapore through five instances in which Singapore served as a centre to this extended part of the British Empire. It argues that an examination of this relationship between Singapore and North Borneo could very much serve as a way of positioning Singapore as a centre of many things to different parts of Southeast Asia.

Jason Lim's chapter, "**China, Entrepôt Trade, and Singapore Chinese Merchants, 1945–1965**," focuses on three issues: What do these missions reveal about the concerns of Chinese merchants in Singapore? What were the challenges faced by the Chinese merchants during the Cold War? What was the response by the government towards these trade missions? The chapter assesses the role played by Chinese merchants in promoting Singapore as a trading hub.

Chapter 3 by JongHo Kim, "**Trading Hub Beyond Ideologies: The Singapore-North Korean Economic Connection and Mission for Industrialization During the Cold War**," delves into the mutual interactions of Singapore, the trading hub, and North Korea, and industrial estate. This exploration is conducted through an analysis of primary sources, including Singapore media reports, national archives from Singapore and South Korea, and CIA archives.

The second section of this book, "**Trade and Identity**," includes three chapters. These chapters examine the shifting relationship between trade and identity, illustrating how economic development and sociopolitical strategies have shaped Singapore's national and international identities. Case studies, such as the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park, demonstrate Singapore's role in fostering innovation and economic modernisation. The authors also emphasise the importance of diversity and social cohesion, demonstrating how these factors have been strategically leveraged to strengthen Singapore's identity as a global hub while maintaining its competitive edge in a rapidly evolving world.

Chapter 4 by Jinghua Xing and George Hong Jiang, "**Shaping the World-Class High-Tech Zone: A Case Study of the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park**," provides a deep understanding of Regional Innovation Ecosystem with the paradigm of Chinese-style modernisation under the background of globalisation, and sheds light upon Suzhou's future development and other areas' efforts in facilitating scientific innovations.

Kian Cheng Lee and Haiping Gao's Chapter, "**Hedging Perspectives for Small States and Regimes: A Comparative Study Between Singapore and Hong Kong**," demonstrates the significance of a purposive and responsive approach in adopting hedging strategies for small states and regimes in a conflicted and volatile world. It does so by examining four independent variables: political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration, and diplomatic engagements.

Chapter 6 by Chang-Yau Hoon and Ying-kit Chan, "**A Hub for Diversity: Social Cohesion as a Statecraft for Nation-Branding in Singapore**," explores how the government employs social cohesion as a form of statecraft for nation-branding and soft power. It delves into the origin and evolution of both state-led and grassroots-driven interfaith initiatives in Singapore.

The third section of this book, "**Diaspora and Governance**," comprises two chapters. This section explores the interplay between diaspora and governance, focusing on how Singapore addresses cultural and societal challenges

while fostering economic and social development. The chapters discuss how cultural expressions such as foodways reflect the integration of new migrant communities, and how innovative governance approaches, such as tripartism, ensure resilience and adaptability in the face of global disruptions. Together, these discussions underscore Singapore's capacity to harmonise diversity and governance to achieve sustainable development.

Chapter 7 by Cheun Hoe Yow, "**Singapore in Diasporic Chinese Foodways: Representation of New Chinese Migrants**," examines the current situation of Singapore in diasporic Chinese foodways, with a specific study on the representation of new Chinese migrants.

Chapter 8 by Celia Lee, "**The Singapore Model of Tripartism in Digital Skills Development: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic**," investigates the various schemes and training initiatives developed through a close tripartite relationship to meet the skills and talent gap to enhance talent mobility in the age of digitisation fuelled by the pandemic.

In summary, this book approaches Singapore from different but intimately connected perspectives, exploring the nation's significance as a regional hub, its trade and diplomatic strategies, its nation-branding efforts, and its impact on global affairs. Each chapter offers a unique viewpoint that collectively illuminates the multifaceted dimensions of Singapore's influence on the global stage through its critical and proactive engagement with the region and beyond.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the School of Social Science, Nanyang Centre for Public Administration, and Chinese Heritage Centre at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) for their generous grants and staff support, which made this project and the academic conferences possible. Hong Liu acknowledges the NTU Strategic Grants (04INS000132C430; 04INS000136C430) in facilitating the research and fieldwork related to this book. We are grateful to all the authors whose insightful contributions are featured in this book. Special thanks go to the editors at Routledge for their professional guidance. This book would not have been possible without their expertise and support.

It goes without saying that the views and interpretations of the chapters are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily represent those of the funding organisations.

Note

1 See, for example, Huang (2018) and the public discourses in Singapore at https://www.sg/sgbicentennial/articles/.

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Part I

Historicity and Network

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1 Singapore in the History of British North Borneo

An Examination of Singapore as Centre to the Region

Danny Tze Ken Wong

1.1 Introduction

Singapore has been many things to different people at different times in Southeast Asia. In what was then the British Empire, Singapore was the centre of administration where the British High Commissioner resided. It was also the hub of Chinese migration and many stopped by Singapore before heading to their final destinations. Likewise, it was also the economic exchange point for businessmen in the region, as well as a centre for education for the region. For a place like British North Borneo (present-day Sabah), Singapore featured prominently throughout its more recent history. This study will examine North Borneo's ties with Singapore through four instances in which Singapore served as a centre to this extended part of the British Empire. The four were: Singapore served as a source of administration and governance; the country was a base from which Straits Chinese businessmen operated in North Borneo; it acted a fount of Chinese intellectual and social movements and an education hub; and, finally, the island-city was a source of skilled labour in the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter argues that an examination of these relations between Singapore and North Borneo has served as a way to position Singapore as a centre of many things in different parts of Southeast Asia.

1.2 Singapore as a Central (Hub) of the Region

In their survey of the long 700 years of history of Singapore, Kwan Chong Guan et al highlighted a very important fact that since early times, Singapore's central geographical location has made it a port polity that was (and still is) attractive to neighbours and visitors. From its early settlements until the establishment of Temasek, Singapore's first recorded settlement, Singapore's centrality has been evident. The importance of this centrality was also made possible or contributed by geopolitical and economic circumstances in maritime Asia that shaped Singapore as an autonomous port-polity.

This autonomous status was lost for a period with the rise of the Melaka Sultanate (c. 1400–1511). It even lost its centrality when Melaka assumed

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such centrality. The fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511 saw Singapore regain its status of centrality in the region in the 16th century. And over the next two centuries, Singapore became geostrategic and important to maritime warfare by being a sultanate, which succeeded Melaka. This was sustained until Stamford Raffles took over the island in 1819.

Since 1819, it took on the role of being a port connected to the regional, East Asian and European trading worlds. Raffles' clear vision of the island's geostrategic importance, followed by first, the East India Company, and later, after 1867, the British Colonial administration, positioned Singapore as Britain's administrative centre in the Far East. Thus, for more than a hundred years, Singapore's position as the centre of administration of the British Empire in Southeast Asia accorded it a special position vis-à-vis the rest of the empire in the region. It gave the city colony an elevated status where, apart from being the seat of the British High Commissioner in Southeast Asia—usually the governor of Singapore also assumed the position of the British High Commissioner—it was also the centre of power and authority to many British institutions, including the main command of the imperial defence (initially, China Station of Royal Navy in the East), regional headquarters to many business and commercial agencies, supported by a main seaport where goods and passengers to the region first arrived, and from there, subdivided and reloaded onto smaller crafts heading to various parts of the region.

In relation to its commercial development, Singapore also attracted people from different parts of Asia and beyond. Since its establishment, the island had become the centre of migration. Chief among the migrants were the Chinese, who mainly originated from the two southern provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. Many passed through Singapore before arriving in the rest of Southeast Asia. There were also Indians and those from the Arab land, who also arrived in Singapore before transiting to elsewhere in the region.

An independent Singapore State in 1965, it inherited much of the roles that it used to play during the British Colonial era, as a centre of commerce anchored in the region and connected to the maritime Asian and international economy (Kwa et al. 2019).

It was also the hub of the Chinese diaspora and many stopped by Singapore before heading to their final destinations. In their analysis of the Qiaopi, Liu Hong and Zhang Huimei argued that institutions and diaspora identity were shaped through the practice of Qiaopi and helped lay the foundation for Singapore as a nexus of migration corridors. Qiaopi is a letter with money sent home to China by overseas Chinese. By focusing on Singapore's role as a strategic migration corridor in linking the region through Qiaopi—which was a shared heritage among diasporic Chinese throughout the world—the study demonstrated how the Qiaopi system played an important role in shaping the migration corridor between China and Southeast Asia (Liu and Zhang 2020: 209). The paper by both authors clearly showed the importance of Singapore as a centre for the conduct of the Qiaopi trade. This centrality of Singapore, and its ability to take on and sustain that role, came mainly from the fact that

it has a longer history of Western domination, having been taken over by the English East India Company since 1819, and that modern township had developed since; that it had a natural port which was astride East and West; and most important of all, it was the centre of the British Administration in Southeast Asia.

Singapore's position as a nexus to the region is a well-established fact. It is evident that throughout its long history, the island port-polity, and later, the island colony and in more recent times as an island-state, has assumed a centrality that has shaped its importance as a hub in Asia. Singapore's geographical position also ensured that the island is connected to the rest of the region of Southeast Asia and wider Asia via different corridors of activities.

This paper intends to explore Singapore's position as a hub and corridor to a part of the region that was situated at the far end (if not the fringes) of the British Empire—North Borneo (present-day Sabah)—with the hope of examining just how important was Singapore as a hub to that part of the region.

1.3 Literature

There are many works on Singapore as a centre and hub of interaction for the region, or Singapore as the focus of diverse purposes. John Miksic et al. traced the centrality of Singapore in the region to at least 700 years. It was a time when Singapore emerged as a new polity in the region. The work points out how the Singapore or Tamasik or Tamask of that time already attracted people of various backgrounds, including businessmen, artisans, performing artists, philosophers and teachers, political refugees and others. This central role was sustained over the next few hundred years. It also inevitably attracted many interests of external powers from the region, chief of them Majapahit and Siam at Ayuthaya, which became a menace to the ruler of Singapore when he fled to Malacca.

Singapore has been the subject of many studies, chief of which is a comprehensive history of the island by Mary Turnbull (Turnbull 1989). Tan Tai Yong et al. traced the history of the island to the period when Sang Nila Utama usurped the ruling rights of the island and maintained a semblance of government; thus, tracing the history of the island back to 700 years. Hong Lysa and Huang Jianli's work on the history of the island state provided many instances of the island's centrality to the region (Hong and Huang 2008). Then there is Paul Kratoska's historical geography piece, which is perhaps the first major work to try to position the island's geography in the region (Kratoska et al. 2005).

The position of Singapore as part of a centrality in the region of Southeast Asia and beyond is unmistaken. But the literature does not seem to emphasise this position. More recently, Professor Liu Hong and Dr Zhang Huimei (Liu and Zhang 2020) have jointly published a paper on Singapore serving as the hub for Chinese migration, including the sending and receiving of Qiaopi, as a form of financial remittances to China.

Singapore today is a financial centre, news and information centre, a hub of activities of transnational and trans-boundary in nature. Yet, just how important Singapore was to a distant place like British North Borneo is what this chapter sets out to investigate.

1.4 British North Borneo

British North Borneo was first acquired by a Chartered company, known as the British North Borneo Company in 1878 (followed by a series of subsequent treaties) from the Sultanate of Brunei, and later, to ensure smooth transfer of a region northeast of the state, from the Sultanate of Sulu. It was granted a royal charter by the British parliament in November 1881. In 1888, the territory became a British protectorate, effectively placing it under British interests throughout its subsequent history. The North Borneo Company's rule on Sabah was interrupted by the Japanese invasion in December 1941. When the war ended in August 1945, the damage experienced by North Borneo was so great that it was impossible for the North Borneo Company to continue its rule and to rebuild the state. Thus, the territory was ceded over to the British Crown in July 1946 (Tregonning 1965) and, along with Sarawak, became the last territory to be incorporated into the British colonial realm. In May 1961, Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman floated the idea of an expanded new federation that would bring together Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei, to be known as Malaysia. The new Federation of Malaysia was established on 16 September 1963, but minus Brunei. Two years later, Singapore left the federation to be an independent nation (Mohamad Noordin 1974).

For a place like British North Borneo (present-day Sabah), Singapore featured prominently throughout its more modern history. This study will examine North Borneo's ties with Singapore through four instances in which Singapore served as a centre to this extended part of the British Empire. They included Singapore as a source of administration and governance; a base from which Straits Chinese businessmen operated in North Borneo; a fount of Chinese intellectual and social movements; an education hub; and finally, a source of skilled labour in the 1950s. This chapter argues that an examination of these relations between Singapore and North Borneo could very much serve as a way of positioning Singapore as a centre of many things in different parts of Southeast Asia.

1.5 Singapore as Source of Administration and Governance

When British North Borneo was first established, the government of the state virtually had to depend on the colonial government in Singapore for instructions and support as it was a commercial company with very little experience in administering a territory that is as large as the Republic of Ireland. Thus,

it continuously looked to Singapore, the headquarters of the British colonial rule in Southeast Asia, for instructions and guidance.

In terms of personnel, the Company's government, then based in Sandakan, looked to the British High Commissioner, who was also the governor of Singapore, for its top administrators. Several of North Borneo's earlier governors were members of the Straits Settlements administration or the Malayan Civil Service. Its first governor, William Treacher, was a colonial officer, originally based in Singapore. Ernest W. Birch, the son of the murdered first Resident of Perak, J.W.W. Birch, was a senior administrator who spent his entire early service in Singapore, and who was appointed as governor of North Borneo. Another officer of the Malayan Civil Service, based in Singapore, Hugh Clifford, who later became a celebrated writer, was also from Malaya and Singapore. This trend persisted until 1960, when Sir William Goode, the last British governor of Singapore, was appointed as the last governor of North Borneo. His experience in the decolonisation of Singapore was deemed to be valuable, as North Borneo was also heading towards decolonisation.

Other than personnel, many of the administrative apparatus, including the law practised in the state, were adapted from laws first passed in Singapore for the Straits Settlements and, later, for British Malaya, before they were adopted in North Borneo. The centrality of Singapore as the major British administrative hub was unmistaken. And when there were legal issues to be resolved, the North Borneo government would turn to Singapore for advice. On many occasions, the attitude of the High Commissioner or officers of the Straits Settlements in Singapore were more critical of the North Borneo Company, and were inclined to favour those who were against the North Borneo Company, especially on issues involving the Indigenous People (Wong 2012). Even in civilian cases, especially those involving a large sum of money, it was common for local companies or individuals to engage or retain the services of lawyers from Singapore to handle cases in North Borneo. This was particularly common during the 18 years of direct colonial rule. Lee Kuan Yew and other well-known lawyers from Singapore were frequent visitors to North Borneo for this purpose (Granvile-Edge and Devadason 1999).

During the initial years of the Company's 60 years of rule of North Borneo, there was much resistance from the Indigenous community, with many of them rebelling through armed insurrections. Once more, Singapore became the source of the Company's main support when it came up short in overcoming the rebels. Even in the years prior to the establishment of the North Borneo rule, Singapore was where many naval expeditions were launched from. Admiral Keppel and the HMS *Dido* sailed from Singapore to put down the resistance of Sherif Mansur in Marudu and paved the way for taking over Labuan in 1846 (Black 1983).

In 1885, the North Borneo Company's forces requested support from Singapore for a gunboat, HMS *Zephyr*, to help to put down a Bajau resistance at Pulo Omadal. Again, in 1885, the Pangiran Shahbandar of Padas Damit area was angry with the Company over claims of rights to territory. He decided to

assemble a force to defy the Company. This led to a campaign launched by the Government to put down the Pangiran and his force. The Company's effort, however, was ineffectual and failed to defeat the Pangiran, and the Governor went into panic. He decided to turn to Singapore for help, sending messages for every available means of assistance. Finally, in that same year, Singapore assembled a force of 170 Sikhs and sent them to North Borneo in pursuit of the Pangiran and his men. After a year, the Company achieved very little. The governor went on to request more help from Singapore and it was given. This time, the Pangiran lost ground and was willing to negotiate. But the event demonstrated once again the reliance of the Company on the support of Singapore to sustain its rule in North Borneo.

From 1894 to 1900, the Company faced its most formidable rebel, Mat Salleh (Mohammed Salleh), a minor chieftain from the headwater of Sugut River. The rebellion was ferocious and well led, so much so that the Company's own police force was inadequate in defeating Mat Salleh. In fact, the rebellion nearly bankrupted the North Borneo Company. Mat Salleh and his men burned down at least two government stations. Again; the Company turned to the High Commissioner in Singapore for help, and through the High Commissioner, to the Foreign Office in Great Britain. The HMS *Plover* and its Royal Marines arrived from Singapore and went in pursuit of Mat Salleh and his gang. Even though the gunboat and the Marines had no direct engagement with Mat Salleh, their presence in 1898 was a morale booster for the Company (Black 1983; Tregonning 1965).

For the administrators in North Borneo, Singapore was also where the Company would send local chieftains who were apprehended for resisting the Company's rule. As early as 1883, the Company decided to deport such characters to Singapore, not necessarily to prison, but to effectively banish them. The first to be treated in this manner was a Serif Alam, who was sheltering some suspected murderers and encouraging resistance against the Company. Serif Alam was deported to Singapore, and later, died in Mecca while on Haj (Wong 1998a). When the Company was making an effort to overcome the Mat Salleh rebellion, there were also discussions on whether to deport Mat Salleh to Singapore. This did not happen as Mat Salleh was killed in January 1900, in a siege of his fort by the Company's troops.

The Company also directed some of its civil or criminal case prisoners to Singapore. This was especially so with European offenders who would serve their prison terms in a Singapore jail like Outram Prison, instead of having them serve their sentences in Sandakan or Jesselton. This was partly to safeguard the 'face' of the prisoner as well as that of the European community.

During the initial stage of World War I, it took the Straits Settlements government to influence a British shipping company to make the Singapore-Sandakan run, after the German-owned company Lloyd stopped servicing the route. The route was considered unprofitable and British companies were unwilling to provide the service. Through the intervention of Singapore, the Straits Steamship Company took over the route.

The imperial defence committee in Singapore decided on how to defend North Borneo when the prospect of war was looming in the late 1930s. This involved the establishment of the North Borneo Volunteer Force in 1938, which was mobilised with the outbreak of the war in December 1941. Finally, the decision not to resist was also issued from Singapore, even as the Japanese were advancing towards Singapore.

1.6 Singapore as the Base for Straits Chinese Businessmen

Chinese businessmen followed closely on the heels of the colonial administrators. The state capital, Sandakan, soon attracted a large community of Chinese businessmen who started businesses and enterprises. These businessmen came from two sources, the first, from Hong Kong and China, and the second group, from the Straits Settlements, principally, Singapore (Wong 1998b). The Singapore businessmen were already active in Labuan since the opening of the island as a part of the Straits Settlements in 1846. When coal was being extracted commercially on the northern tip of the island, a coaling station was started. Chinese coolies were brought to Labuan in large numbers. At the height of the coal mining operation, no fewer than 1,500 Chinese were concentrated on the northern tip of the island. Businessmen from Singapore began to flock to Victoria harbour on the southern part of the island to operate the mines and to do business.

For those who came from the Straits Settlements and via Singapore, the businessmen, apart from engaging in trading activities, were also the main businessmen who were operators engaged with the revenue farming system, especially in the selling of opium, operating gambling farms, and pawnbrokering farms. This section will zero in on one such personality and how his connection with Singapore had allowed him to prosper and eventually returned to Singapore to establish a bank.

In 1938, the *Straits Budget* carried an obituary on Chee Swee Cheng, who passed away in Singapore at the age of 70. While the obituary highlighted Chee Swee Cheng's eminency in the business circle of Singapore as the chairman of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (OCBC) (*Straits Budget,* 25 August 1938; *North Borneo Herald*, 16 September 1938), it also mentioned one aspect of Chee's life that was not well known to those in Singapore. The obituary mentioned that Chee made his fortune from operating the opium monopoly in Labuan and later, in North Borneo. This section will trace the career of Chee Swee Cheng, whose operation base began in Singapore, and show how he prospered in North Borneo.

Information concerning Chee Swee Cheng's life in Borneo came mainly from two sources. The first was the *Labuan Official Gazette,* which provided us with many details of Chee Swee Cheng's public and business life. After he moved his operation base to Jesselton, most of his official dealings were with the North Borneo Company. Hence, the Company's papers and documents, in the form of the CO874, North Borneo Company Papers, and the

Secretariat Files, provided us with much of this information. Apart from that, the fortnightly issued *North Borneo Herald* also carried items on Chee Swee Cheng's life in North Borneo.

Chee Swee Cheng was born in 1866, into a business class family in Malacca (Wong 1997). The family was Hokkien and originated from Zhangzhou, the southern Chinese province of Fujian. By the time he was born, the family had already settled in Malacca for six generations. Chee's grandfather, Chee Yam Chuan, was a prominent businessman and was the founder of Messrs Leack Chin Seng & Co., a general merchant store in Singapore. Apart from their business in Singapore, the family also owned a large track of land and estates in Melaka. Apparently, the family made its fortune from nutmeg planting and trading. Chee Yam Chuan benefitted from his close relationship with the Malay elites. He was a business partner of Raja Jumaat, one of the sons of the Sultan of Selangor, working on tin mines around the 1840s. The partnership continued even with the son of Raja Jumaat, Raja Bot, who used to live with the Chee family in Melaka. Chee Swee Cheng's father, Chee Hoon Boong, inherited the family business from Leack Chin Seng but also engaged in the extensive planting of tapioca and operated sawmills. He was, for some years, the leader of the Hokkien community in Melaka. Thus by looking at Chee Swee Cheng's father and grandfather, it was clear that the family business was already localised, and the family was astute to form partnerships with Indigenous elites such as Raja Jumaat and had also begun fostering ties with the British administrators, as in the case of the appointment of Chee Yam Chuan as Justice of the Peace by the British Administration.

Thus, by the time Chee Swee Cheng had completed his English education at Malacca High School, he joined the firm of Lim Tiang Wah and Co. in Singapore, where he became a cashier. Later, he joined the family firm, Leack Chin Seng and Co., and finally, at the firm of Soon Thye, where he worked as a manager. From Singapore, Chee moved to Labuan in the 1890s and joined his friend, Wee Guan Toh, as partner in the lucrative general spirit and opium farm operated then by the firm of Wee Lim Gwan & Co. The firm prospered and Chee made his money, which he invested in other businesses. From Labuan, the partners eventually branched out to gain control of the even more lucrative opium concession on the West Coast of North Borneo after the region was opened upon the establishment of the new township of Jesselton in 1899. Being the younger of the two, Chee was also the manager, overseeing the entire operation of the firm. Chee was also one of the eight partners of the Straits Hokkien business syndicate of Ban Chin Lee, which was established and based in Sandakan. The Company eventually won control of all the spirit, opium and gambling revenue farms in the state. It was this partnership that had bankrolled most of Chee's business venture in North Borneo.

When the Chartered Company decided to establish a new township named Jesselton in 1899, Chee Swee Cheng decided to move his operation from Labuan to this new place. There were two things that probably prompted Chee to make the decision. First, the starting of a new township presented

many business opportunities, particularly in terms of building materials and construction works. Secondly, the establishment of Jesselton, which was the second major township on the west coast of North Borneo, which came shortly after Beaufort (established 1898), indicated greater future economic growth in the area. The fact that a railway line was still being constructed in the area since 1896, also augured well for Chee to move his business operations to the west coast of North Borneo.

It was also likely that Chee's decision was influenced by the terrible economic spell undergone by Labuan during the late 1890s. Over a span of a few years, many leading businessmen of Labuan suffered, and a few were declared bankrupt. Among them was Lee Sin Teck of Chop Teck Guan; Low Choon Sin, who was the former opium farmer; and Goh Swee Chiang (*Labuan Official Gazette*, 1 November 1895, 1 June 1896, 1 May 1894 and 1 October 1896). Labuan was at that time placed under the administration of the North Borneo Company (1890–1906).

The work to build the new township of Jesselton started on 9 November 1899. Land was cleared and shops, a wharf, wave barriers and government buildings were constructed and opened for use by mid-1900. It was towards the business of the construction of the new township that Chee Swee Cheng started his first business on the mainland, brickfields at Karamunsing named Hubeck Line and Brick Work to provide building materials for the construction of the new township (Lee and Chow 1997: 19–20). According to the *North Borneo Herald*, Chee Swee Cheng had over 150 men at work cutting jungle and making bricks. The brickfields had been cleared of all jungle and there were a large quantity of pressed bricks ready to burn (*BNBH*, 19 May 1902). At the completion of the shop houses at the end of 1900, a total of 17 shop titles were given to the Chinese shopkeepers who had moved with the Company from Gaya to Gantian. Thus, Jesselton became fully functional by 1900. When the shop lots were sold, Chee Swee Cheng was among those who bid for the lots (*BNBH*, 19 May 1902).

Like his grandfather and father before him, Chee Swee Cheng also cultivated good relationship with government officials. He was particularly close to Governor Ernest Woodford Birch, whom he knew from Singapore when the latter was serving in Singapore and the Malay States. Chee Swee Cheng obtained a 500-acre plot of land from the government. The plot was situated at Beaufort, about 50 miles south of Jesselton and connected by rail. He named the estate Woodford Estate, after the middle name of Governor Birch. Again, the estate was financed by the Ban Chin Lee Partnership (*The Singapore and Straits Directory*, 1904). The move demonstrated Chee's close ties with the government officials, which became one of his most important attributes in his business dealings. However, unlike others who invested in rubber planting, Chee Swee Cheng opted for planting tapioca and the processing of sago. This was a strange decision as both plants were not popular plants. Unlike rubber, which fetched a good price during the early years of the 20th century, tapioca did not promise high return. In the case of sago, earlier attempts by Chinese

traders in Labuan, Weston and Gaya to produce them en masse were all failed ventures. As the sago tree grew in the wild, there was no way to control its growth. However, Chee Swee Cheng's decision was probably prompted by the reversal of the same reasons behind the failure or risks involved in the two plants earlier.

First, due to the unpopular nature of tapioca as an agriculture plant, the output was limited. Chee, however, had identified Singapore as the main market for the tapioca powder to be produced from his estate. It was the same with sago. The earlier failure of other companies in the sago industry resulted in the rise in demand for the commodity. Furthermore, there was no need for Chee to invest in planting as the sago trees were wildly grown. The area involved, Beaufort up to Kimanis, was suitable for sago growing as the area had considerable patches of swampy area. Chee Swee Cheng's investment in the Woodford Estate was not confined to clearing and planting activities. He also brought in a large quantity of machinery to set up a sago and tapioca factory. Amongst the machinery was a large boiler via Singapore. The *Herald* reported that because the boiler was very big and weighed about 4 tonnes, there was some difficulty experienced in getting it down from *S.S Kedah* on to Jesselton Wharf (*BNBH*, 19 May 1902). Apart from Woodford Estate, another occasion where Chee's closeness to European officials was clearly evident, was his decision to establish a ward in the Jesselton Hospital for the benefit of the Europeans. This is a clear demonstration of his closeness with the Europeans, or at least his understanding of the need to operate within the framework of an alliance with them.

The next major business venture that Chee Swee Cheng went into was the setting up of the Ice and Power Company in Jesselton. The idea was to provide ice and electricity to the town. The venture was a very important development in the history of North Borneo as this was the first time since the establishment of the State of North Borneo that electricity was about to be introduced. For this, Chee Swee Cheng set up a consortium that consisted of several Straits Hokkien leaders to garner financial means for the purpose of setting up the company. The venture was a success and people in Jesselton and its vicinity were soon provided with electricity. Even though it was not for throughout the day, it nevertheless provided new lights and new possibility to the town, including the introduction of a cinema.

Few actually knew of Chee's ventures in North Borneo, despite his involvement in so many businesses and activities in the country. It took a different venture for Chee Swee Cheng's name to achieve a lasting place in the history of the people. It was in 1913 that Chee decided to set up a scholarship fund in his name. The scholarship was to provide funding for a student from an English school to continue studying for higher secondary education (*BNBH*, 17 March 1913). The initial scholarship was meant for Sandakan but was later increased to two, one each for the East Coast and the West Coast. Initially, he only provided a sum of $1,000, but added another $5,000 a few months later

(*BNBH*, 1 September 1913). The scholarship continued for many years, even beyond World War II.

By 1917, Chee Swee Cheng began to withdraw from his business interests in North Borneo. The money that he had made in North Borneo made him a wealthy man. He then spent the rest of his time building up on his next business venture, the establishment of the OCBC in 1932 in Singapore, where he remained chairman till his death in 1938.

Chee Swee Cheng was but one of the many Chinese merchants who came from Singapore, and whose ties to Singapore were not broken but sustained over the years. Several others, including his earlier partner, Cheah Loon Ghee, basically stayed on in North Borneo until the end.

1.7 Singapore as Mover of Chinese Intellectual Movements or Organisations

Recent literature began to interrogate the momentous event of May Fourth, 1919, on the region of Southeast Asia (Wang and Poon 2019). While the impact of this movement on the Chinese in other parts of Southeast Asia was evident, the same could not be said of its influence or spread in North Borneo. Chinese intellectual and mobilisations came, however, through other means, including ethnic organisations and national salvation organisations. And most of them could trace their roots to Singapore.

To the Chinese community in North Borneo, Singapore was regarded as a place where intellectual ideas were developed and disseminated. This section will look into how community leaders in Singapore provided the intellectual basis for the creation of a Hakka identity and how the idea was disseminated through the mobilisation of the Hakka organisations in the region, including that in North Borneo. The event was so important in the history of the Hakka organisation that they continue to recall this in their own literatures.

For many years since their migration to North Borneo, the Hakka community existed in smaller groups, often determined by their county of origins. There was no single identity, nor was there a single organisation. While one may be conscious of their Hakka identity, especially in relation to others, internally, they were divided. There were Hakka businessmen who arrived in the capital town of Sandakan and set up a Hakka association as early as 1886. Most of these Hakka were of Huizhou (Fuichew) origin. There were also Hakka Christians who were brought into the state via arrangements made between the North Borneo government and the Basel Missionary Society since 1882. The mission had started work among the Hakka in Guangdong province in 1851. Many were forced to leave China due to persecution (Wong 1998b; Lutz and Lutz 1998). The Hakka Christians did not organise themselves as part of the Hakka associations. Instead, they were tied to the mission and church. Many of them came from the Jiaying (Kaying) Prefecture including Meixian (Moiyan), though there were also some who were from the counties in Huizhou, including Baoan (Pao On).

This situation sustained for years until the 1930s when there was a serious effort in promoting the identity of being known as 'Hakka' instead of being subdivided according to their counties or prefecture of origins. The pioneer in this effort was Aw Boon Haw (Hu Wenhu), who was a Hakka from Yongding in Fujian. Aw made his fortune from the family business of selling a medicinal ointment known as Tiger Balm, first in Rangoon, Burma, before he settled down in Singapore and mobilised his resources to use the island-state as his base to drive a common Hakka identity. It is difficult to pin down Aw's motivation for pushing for a Hakka identity. But being someone of Yongding origin, a minority within the larger Hakka community, could have contributed to Aw's longing for a unified Hakka identity.

Aw made his move after the family moved their operation to Singapore, and through his wealth, he acquired the influential Chinese daily of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and launched his campaign to promote a Hakka identity that included all who identified themselves as Hakka.

But Aw Boon Haw did more than merely calling for Hakka solidarity. With the establishment of the Federation of Nanyang Hakka Associations, he provided a certain way of thinking and the concepts on Hakka-ness and Hakka studies. He encouraged and promoted Luo Xianglin's concept of Hakka-ness and Hakka identity (Wong 2023). Luo Xianglin, who taught at Hong Kong University, published a seminal work on the question of Hakka-ness where he defined Hakka identity, and gave it a conceptual framework that hinged on the idea that the Hakka had originated from the *Zhong Yuan*, or heartland of China, in the Yellow River Basin, but were displaced and immigrated to the south. This idea was an important departure from all previous attempts to unify the Hakka people (Luo 1933).

Through Luo Xianglin's work, Hakka's existence was given a new breath of life. Hakka-ness was now gaining recognition, and those associated with the community were now proud to learn that their dialect group, which had thus far been associated with a rural existence, were given a different interpretation and the dialect group was deemed to be sophisticated. For the ordinary Hakka, this Hakka identity came not from the in-depth studies of scholars, but rather from the more down-to-earth dissemination of ideas and concepts in newspapers. For this, Aw Boon Haw had the answers in the numerous newspapers that he owned or could influence; these included *Yangon Ribao*, *Myanmar Morning News Sin Chew Daily, Sin Bin Ribao, Sinsiam Ribao*, etc. Chief of these was the *Sin Chew Daily*, the flagship newspaper under Aw's newsgroup. Various scholars expounded on the idea of being a Hakka through these newspapers. Even Aw Boon Haw contributed articles on the Hakka to the paper. In 1938, he published an article on the *Spirit of Hakka*. He also distributed Luo Xianglin's seminal work on the Hakka in mass numbers. Some of the ideas in the book were also serialised in the newspapers.

The various efforts to promote Hakka identity, including those by Aw Boon Haw and others, were admirable, but came at a time when the Chinese, the Hakka included, were confronted by bigger issues of national survival. Thus,

it was not surprising that, despite all the efforts, the notion of Hakka identity could only have an effect on those involved in Hakka organisations or those who were genuinely interested in the plight of the Hakka. Aw Boon Haw further asked for Hakka associations to be established in order to unite the Hakka in the region. These efforts to promote the virtues of Hakka-ness helped to provide a certain sense of pride and unity among those who professed to be Hakka. This laid the basis for the establishment of Hakka organisations at a global level but that would come only later. In 1933 and 1939, Aw Boon Haw's promotion of the idea of Hakka-ness and Hakka identity went as far as the physical establishment of more Hakka associations. However, it was still not embraced by all Hakkas.

Through this initiative, new Hakka associations were established, either as new organisations, or evolved from others which were previously known by their regional identification or name. Others retained their regional identity but affiliated their organisations as part of the Nanyang Hakka Federation. The use of the term Hakka was not an immediate move. Instead, it was still known as a Hakka-affiliated organisation, or Ke Shu Gong Hui, denoting their willingness to adopt the term 'Hakka' as their overall name.

The establishment of this new Hakka identity in Singapore marked the beginning of the rise of the Hakka identity in North Borneo. Prior to 1940, the Hakka Association in Sandakan was named The Er Cheng Hui Guan (Association of Er Cheng people or Huizhou Association), but it evolved into the Hakka Association just before the outbreak of World War II. In Jesselton, in 1940, the Hakka set up their new Hakka Association. Thus far, there was no Hakka Association on the west coast of North Borneo. This was likely because of the great influence of the Basel Church and other Hakka-affiliated Christian churches on these people. But once the call for the establishment of Hakka associations were made, even those who were influenced by the church also established their respective Hakka associations—even with the clergyman serving as the president. Since the introduction of this new name of Hakka, the tone was set for further transformation of the Hakka people and their identity. While many of the regional-based Hakka associations sustained their identity and kept their original names, they all claimed to be part of the Hakka affinity.

When the Sino-Japanese War broke out on 7 July 1937, many Chinese leaders took the initiatives to mobilise the Chinese community in Southeast Asia to raise funds and to provide assistance to China's war efforts. Again, Singapore became the centre for activities of such a nature. The main personality in association with this was Tan Kah Kee, once a major figure in the business world, who took on the task of mobilising support from among the overseas Chinese to bolster China's war effort. These came through two main initiatives. The first was to organise the Chinese in the entire Southeast Asia to donate to the various funds set up for the purpose of supporting the Chinese in China. The main funds were the China Relief Fund, organised for the purpose of raising money to alleviate the sufferings faced by the Chinese as the war raged on in the country.

For this purpose, Tan Kah Kee invited Chinese leaders of various places and political entities to send representatives to join in the meetings in Singapore, to get their support for the Chinese war efforts. North Borneo sent two members, representing both West Coast and East Coast Chinese, to the meetings, and once returned, they organised the fund-raising campaigns in both the east and west coasts of North Borneo. The west coast was represented by Yong Thiam Cheok, while the east coast was represented by Kwan Ji Chuan, the leader of the Sandakan-based Man Woo Loong Company. Through their efforts, many fund-raising programmes were organised and valuable funds were raised. Altogether, the Chinese in North Borneo raised a total of $160,000 (Song 1963), a considerable sum from a community that was small and achieved very little in terms of economic development.

The second initiative was for the Chinese leaders to mobilise personnel who wanted to serve in the Chinese army or at least to play a role by being in China. After the outbreak of the war, part of China's survival was sustained through the vital Lido Burma Road, which required a huge number of personnel and maintenance. In order to keep the road open, there was a need for many mechanics and drivers. Tan Kah Kee's appeal for support through the mobilising of youths who fit the job description of either drivers or mechanics received a rousing success. More than 3,000 youths responded to what is known as the Nan Qiao Ji Gong (Mechanical Workers of Nanyang Chinese). They were from all locations in Southeast Asia, responding to a call from Singapore to serve in their ancestral lands at a time of national survival. In the same manner, Chinese youths from British North Borneo also responded to the call. At least 10 of them joined the mission to become mechanics and drivers on the Lido Burma Road. And like those from other parts of Southeast Asia, many had signed up with the Chinese National Army and served as military personnel. In all, both initiatives were the brain child of Tan Kah Kee, and it became even more influential as he was based in Singapore, which was seen as the centre of efforts by the overseas Chinese in supporting China's war effort.

1.8 Singapore as a Hub for Education and Source of Labour and Talents

Right from the beginning, most places in North Borneo only offer up to lower secondary education. Therefore, the young in North Borneo and other parts of Southeast Asia would go to Singapore for their higher education and graduate from the island-state. Elizabeth Choy, the heroine who operated against the Japanese Army in Singapore, was born and bred in North Borneo before moving over to Singapore in 1929 for her education at the Convent of Holy Infant Jesus (Zhou 1995).

Singapore was a source of labour for the North Borneo Company almost immediately after the Company took control of the territory in 1881. The requirement for labour to open up the country was pressing, especially after the Company government found that the Indigenous communities were not

suitable for commercial labour. The idea of coming to work was anathema to the Indigenous People, many who were still practising shifting agriculture, while others still regarded gathering and hunting as their main economic life. For example, the Dusun people were major rice planters, and it was deemed that the Company should not disrupt this staple food production activity to ensure that there was sufficient food produced for the country. Thus, the option was to import labour. For this purpose, the Company turned to its agent in Singapore who then worked with labour brokers to bring the much-needed labour to Singapore. The target group was the Chinese. This was not new, considering the fact that coal mine owners on Labuan Island had been actively procuring labour from Singapore since 1846. Thus, when the North Borneo Company was looking for labourers, they too, turned to the labour brokers in Singapore to bring labourers to North Borneo (Black 1983: 41).

The North Borneo Company soon found getting labourers directly from China could be more profitable as they were cheaper and certainly had not picked up bad habits and bad practices associated with labourers who had worked in Malaya or Singapore before taking up contracts to work in North Borneo. Thus, the immigration history of the state reads of wave after wave of Chinese labourers being brought from China via Hong Kong. There were many schemes, and labourers who were brought in for different purposes. Nevertheless, Singapore continued to supply labourers, especially skilled labourers, who were already adjusted to the way of life in the tropics. The fact that the country was sparsely populated meant that the reliance on Chinese labour continued. When the Company started to construct a railway line on the west coast, it had to get the subcontractors to get labourers from Singapore and Hong Kong, without whom the railway would never have been constructed (British North Borneo Company, Report on the Survey on the West Coast to Tenom by W. Tower Addressed to Messrs Pauling & Co. Ltd. CO874/218).

Singapore also supplied officials at various levels, including specialised officers for North Borneo's police (North Borneo Armed Constabulary), from commandant to adjutants and other officers, as well as other ranks. When North Borneo first set up its police force, its designated commandment came to Singapore to recruit his policemen. The first group of recruits, mainly natives of India (100 Punjab and Northwest Frontier Sepoy), Somalians and 20 Malays (Black 1983: 52), formed the first batch of the policemen in the state. On Labuan Island, many of the Malay policemen were recruited from Singapore, including the senior officer in charge of the police on Labuan. The last senior police officer of Labuan before the Japanese landed in 1942 was Senior Inspector Yeo Kok Hoe, who was from the Singapore Police Force (Yeo 2015).

Singapore was also where the Company would turn to in order to obtain its initial clerical services. Many qualified Eurasians, Chinese and Ceylonese Tamils were recruited from Singapore, where many had qualified through the schools there. These recruits staffed the civil service as clerks, account clerks

and treasurers, while others were station masters, dressers in hospital, apothecaries and teachers. There was also a successive number of imams recruited to head the various mosques in the state. Another group of people often associated with Singapore were the Malay teachers for the Malay vernacular schools that sprang up after 1915. In both cases, there were precedents from similar arrangement between Labuan and Singapore (Wong 2004). It must be emphasised that most of the imams and Malay teachers recruited were not natives of Singapore. Rather, they came from all over the Malay Peninsula and, in some cases, even from Sumatra. But they were all recruited via Singapore. This was where the reputation of Singapore as the source of labour and talent was built. The common experience of those recruited in this manner, and their journey to North Borneo made in successive numbers, showed that there existed a corridor of labour migration between Singapore and North Borneo.

The labour corridor between Singapore and North Borneo continued after the war to meet North Borneo's labour needs. This was partly caused by the gradual ending of Chinese migration out of China due to China's changing political atmosphere after the Communist Party took power in 1949. At the same time, post-war Singapore was facing economic challenges, where post-war shortages had affected job availability. The economic situation in North Borneo, while not exactly better than Singapore, nonetheless was in the process of reconstruction after the massive destruction caused by the war. There were sufficient jobs to go around, especially in construction and agriculture. This resulted in constant labour movements between Singapore and North Borneo throughout the period between 1946 and 1963. Relations between the two places continued to be sustained by these corridors of labour migration.

This situation continued, especially in the years leading up to when the two states joined to form the Federation of Malaysia. The period between 1960 and 1961 especially saw two sides engaging in multiple talks trying to resolve the shortage of labour in North Borneo and oversupply of labour in Singapore. Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and his friend, Donald Stephens, worked very hard to resolve this matter for the benefit of the two sides. That went on even after both sides became part of Malaysia in 1963.

The discussion between North Borneo (or Sabah post-1963) and Singapore on labour continued even after 1963, when both states became part of Malaysia. Singapore continued to have an excess of labour while Sabah was always short of skilled labour. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore demanded that Sabah take 50% off its excess labour force. This was especially for projects that were financed by Singapore loans. By doing this, it was hoped that Singapore contractors would be in a good position to contract for such projects (FS Fry to DEA, Memorandum No 1671, 25 July 1963, A1838/280, 3028/2/1Part 1= North Borneo Political).

In July 1964, Donald Stephens, the chief minister of Sabah, announced that his government would make "drastic changes" in its labour policy in

the next few months. Recruitment of skilled labour from the Philippines and Indonesia, which had been going on for many years, would be stopped and Malaysians would be admitted instead. Commenting on the statement that 7,865 unemployed people in Singapore were prepared to work in Borneo, Stephens said, "...we would like to have them if they are skilled, but at the same time we have to protect our own people" (Deputy High Commissioner, WB Pritchett to Australian High Commissioner in Malaysia, 30 July 1964, A1838/280, 32028/1 Part 2, North Borneo-Sabah-Political General).

In February 1965, it was reported that there were 70,000 people out of a job in Singapore, and that the Sandakan Contractors Association was due to be in Singapore to recruit suitable workers. There existed a labour shortage in Sabah at that time due to the ban by Indonesia and the Philippines (Inward savigram 8 February 1965).

Singapore was also where technical support was sourced from. In Sabah, more sophisticated police laboratory work had to depend on the chief chemist of Singapore. In 1957, a total of 58 exhibits from North Borneo were sent to Singapore for analysis. After September 1963, Singapore also sent technical teams for survey and a technical team led by the industrial advisor to the Singapore Ministry of Finance was sent there to assist in project development in Sabah. Also in the same year, 17 teachers from Singapore responded to Sabah's call for assistance to serve in the schools in Sabah (Press Summary of the Australian High Commission in KL, 22 May 1964, A1838/280 & 32028/1 Part 2, North Borneo-Sabah-Political General).

1.9 Concluding Remarks

Singapore was held in high regards by the people of North Borneo (Sabah) throughout the state's history. The four channels of ties that were discussed in this paper had bound the people of North Borneo and Singapore. These ties were not an equal relationship, with Singapore playing a more advanced centre or hub for North Borneo in almost every aspect. The centrality of Singapore as the main British administrative centre and commercial centre had ensured that it had a relative advantage over others, and that it also made it attractive to others. For quality human development, the people of North Borneo turned to Singapore. For leadership and inspiration, the leaders of North Borneo (and later, Sabah), turned to Singapore. The centrality of Singapore in the region on so many fronts has accorded the city a special place in the hearts of people from North Borneo and, later, Sabah.

It is interesting that Singapore's position as the centre or hub for the region has been sustained and continues even today. To the people in the region, including those from Sabah, Singapore may not be playing the same roles

discussed in this chapter. Today, it takes on a new role as the centre for commercial activities, financial centre for the region and a hub for quality education.

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2 China, Entrepôt Trade, and Singapore Chinese Merchants, 1945–1965

Jason Lim

2.1 Introduction

For seven centuries, Singapore has been a hub for business activities on the island, and an Asian regional corridor for the entrepôt trade connecting China and Southeast Asia. By the end of the 13th century, a new settlement called Singapura was established on the island of Temasek, which became an important "export gateway" to Riau and Johor, with commodities arriving from China, the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia (Kwa, Heng and Tan 2009, 20–28). It was "a prosperous emporium that catered mainly to the Chinese market" but by 1405, the new Ming Dynasty banned all Chinese private trading and Temasek had become a victim of competing regional powers (Kwa, Heng and Tan 2009, 31–32). Nonetheless, the China market continued to be the focus of the entrepôt trade for Temasek/Singapura. Archaeological diggings since 1984 have unearthed shards of ceramic jars produced in southern China (Kwa, Heng and Tan 2009, 43–51). Singapura still had a functioning port in 1606 with a *shahbandar* (port master) appointed by the Johor court (Borschberg 2016, 17–25).

The establishment of a trading post on Singapore by the British in 1819, therefore, reinforced the strategic role of the island as an entrepôt port for the Chinese market. Huff noted that "the basis for the economic development of Singapore was – and for most of its history has remained – geography" (Huff 1994, 7). Singapore was already well known to Chinese traders who had been conducting trade with the local population. Singapore's role as a British port expanded, and people from East, South and Southeast Asia arrived to work and trade. Research has been done on Singapore's growth as an entrepôt port from 1819 to 1941 and its trade with China (Wong 1978; Wong 1960, 106–133), and on the roles played by European and Chinese merchants (Chiang 1978, 47–66). Singapore became a key port city for Chinese merchants to expand their business and trading networks across East and Southeast Asia by opening shops and/or starting branches of their family businesses from the Qing Empire and, after 1912, the Republic of China (ROC). The entrepôt trade was lucrative and merchants acted as brokers, importing goods from China into Singapore and then re-exporting the goods and/or re-exporting Southeast Asian (especially Malayan) goods to China.

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Research on Singapore Chinese merchants has taken two broad approaches. The first approach, a major part of the official narrative by the state, focuses on the merchants' philanthropic work and their "rags-to-riches" stories. It is also combined with overseas Chinese nationalism to teach young Singaporeans about the importance of patriotism, even if it was patriotism directed towards another country (China). From these success stories, the state will select those that fit the narrative of the selfless individual exhibiting care and concern for the less well-off. It is the image of a man who arrived in Singapore (some with few possessions), worked hard, struck it rich and then donated large sums of money to the Chinese community. Their hard work, wealth accumulation and community concern are values that the post-colonial state wants younger Singaporeans, accused frequently by the government of exhibiting selfish or individualistic behaviour, to emulate. When Sun Yat-Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall introduced its Gallery 4 of prominent Chinese merchants to the media in February 2020, a curator told the press that "we believe that the Chinese business pioneers demonstrated values such as integrity, loyalty, altruism and innovation in their business dealings". An official from the National Heritage Board further explained that the refurbished gallery will "distil and instil" these values to "provide more relatable role models for our younger generation" (Leong 2020). Research work by Wang Gungwu, Yen Ching-Hwang and Yong Ching-Fatt have focussed on Chinese merchants conducting their businesses in British Malaya, their patriotism towards the ROC during the Sino-Japanese conflicts from the 1920s, the promotion of anti-Japanese activities in the 1930s, their role as community leaders, and their relationship with the colonial masters to maintain law and order that ensure smooth business transactions and trade. Yen and Yong have also made references in their works to business profits and losses, capital accumulation, labour costs, bank loans and crises management, but these studies largely focus on business strategies and the impact on domestic politics, and exclude the impact of decolonisation and the Cold War after 1945 (Wang 1981; Yong 1987; Wang 1990; Yong 1992; Yen 2002; Yen 2014).

The second approach to Chinese business history in Singapore provides a culturalist argument for the merchants' success. From the 1980s, with Singapore an Asian "economic tiger", the merchants' "Chinese-ness" and Confucianist outlook became the raison d'être of their economic success. Former Deputy Prime Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee, in questioning Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (first published in German in 1904/05), wrote that "the moral basis of entrepreneurial behaviour … was founded on the Confucian ethic, not the Protestant ethic" (Chan and Chiang 1994, ix). Confucianism and traditional Chinese business practices such as *guanxi* (connections) and *xinyong* (trust) were accepted as the basis for the merchants' commercial success (Tan 1990; Gomez and Hsiao 2004; Fock 2009). Historical studies explained the success of a few prominent merchants in terms of their values, such as their frugality, treatment of apprentices

and subordinates, organisational skills and relationship with other merchants. The division of business trades in Singapore along linguistic lines show how merchants speaking a particular language (or "dialect") would dominate a trade through the organisation of guilds and trade associations (Cheng 1985). However, the business concerns of these associations are not the focus of research. When the merchants come together for a common cause, it becomes a showcase of "overseas Chinese nationalism". For instance, works about the organisation at the apex of the Chinese business community, the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC), focus on how merchants worked together to raise funds for China whenever the country faced natural disasters, or organise anti-Japanese activities to play their part in the Chinese war effort. After World War II, the SCCC involved itself with local politics, with one study examining internal debates about whether the chamber should participate in the 1955 general election in Singapore (Visscher 2007).

These two approaches pose a problem in understanding how merchants tried to navigate their way in a changing world in post-1945 Singapore as the end of World War II gave way to the Cold War, which brought new challenges to the Chinese merchants in Singapore. The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), foreign exchange issues, Singapore's trade with the Dutch East Indies (DEI) and the Sterling Trade Pact with Japan were critical issues for them between 1949 and 1950 (Huang 1995, 161–192). Tea merchants in Singapore had to consider purchasing tea from Taiwan when imports from China had slowed down considerably due to the Great Leap Forward. The China trade had also been politicised by the Chinese merchants in Singapore through separate arrangements by missions to China in 1956 and Taiwan in 1957 (Lim 2010). What these two works have revealed are Chinese merchants' concerns arising from international relations. While we know how the port has shaped Singapore's colonial economy, we know less about how merchants had made the port a success story since credit has gone to the colonial administrators.

The entrepôt trade was not only the economic lifeblood of Singapore, with foods imported by merchants in Singapore to be re-exported; it was also the reason merchants migrated to Singapore in the first place. Singapore attained limited autonomy in April 1955 and full internal self-government in June 1959, joined Malaysia in September 1963 and became an independent country in August 1965. Considering the importance of Singapore as a major port for the intra-Asian trade that was revived after World War II in 1945, the history of post-war Singapore has not explained how Chinese merchants, who were major players in this trade, viewed changes in East and Southeast Asia after 1945 and the adjustments they had to make to ensure their business survival in Singapore.

I suggest that a third approach be taken that focuses on the merchants' sense of realism. When dealing with problems faced after 1945, Chinese merchants had to work with each other (across linguistic boundaries and even with non-Chinese merchants) to find solutions without becoming a burden

to the community and to remain engaged with the Singapore government. This chapter focuses on merchants involved in the China trade through the entrepôt port of Singapore. The start of the Chinese civil war between the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1945 had a devastating impact on their businesses. Confucianism and traditional Chinese business practices are not useful in helping us understand how they worked to keep their businesses alive in the changing international climate. Another crucial challenge faced by the merchants after 1945 was the status of the entrepôt trade for Singapore after it was separated from the Malayan hinterland by the creation of the Malayan Union and the Crown Colony of Singapore in 1946. What do we know about the role of the Chinese merchants in Singapore in promoting the pre-war entrepôt trade? Overseas Chinese nationalism will not explain the actions the merchants need to take from Singapore, as the civil war was an internal conflict in China. After the Citizenship Ordinance was passed in 1957, any loyalty to political forces in China had to be cast aside as Singapore worked towards full internal self-government. After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed in October 1949, what did merchants do as the Chinese market became gradually closed to external (including overseas Chinese) merchants? What was the relationship between the Chinese merchants and the colonial, Labour Front (LF) and People's Action Party (PAP) governments of Singapore between 1945 and 1965? How did merchants promote their businesses in Singapore during this period and, if access to the Chinese market was blocked, did they look for alternative sources for their commodities? What did merchants do to ensure their survival of their trade and businesses?

2.2 Impact of the Chinese Civil War

With the end of World War II, Chinese businesses in Singapore had to pick up the pieces of their trade from pre-war days. Soaring inflation was a major problem and the prices of imported Chinese goods remained high. An orange from China cost $10 per kati (600 grams) (China Goods 1946). Another problem faced by merchants during the British Military Administration (BMA) period was the paperwork required to bring imports into Singapore. In January 1946, as three ships departed Hong Kong for Singapore with fresh fruits and vegetables from China, merchants feared that the BMA officials could delay the release of the cargo until its details were reported to the Price Controller (Another Food Cargo from China Today, 1946). With the end of the BMA in April 1946, and an improvement in conditions of the China trade between Singapore and Hong Kong, SCCC President Lien Ying Chow embarked on a three-week trip to discuss "all aspects of trade" with the Hong Kong colonial government and the National Government of the ROC (Malayan Merchants Trade Revival in South China Ports, 1946).

The civil war between the KMT and the CCP meant that the National Government of the ROC placed greater emphasis on its own survival. It passed

laws focussed on the "suppression of [communist] banditry" and paid little attention to the China trade with Chinese merchants in Singapore. At this time, overseas Chinese were citizens of the ROC, according to the country's 1929 Nationality Law. The National Government had to publicly place some importance on China's trade with Southeast Asia as most overseas Chinese resided in the region. In Singapore, the ROC National Government established a permanent office of the "Commercial Adviser to the Consul-General". The first Commercial Adviser, Lee Chi Fu from the Chinese Ministry of Economic Affairs, was appointed in November 1946 and started work in February 1947. Lee's role was to promote better trade relations among Singapore, British Malaya and the ROC (National Archives of Singapore [NAS], SCA 160/46, letter from the Consul-General of the ROC in Singapore to the Acting Colonial Secretary of Singapore, 11 January 1947). He was the key contact person for any merchant who had problems in their business with China to build up "a smoother flow of trade between China and Malaya within a short time" (China Trade Adviser in Singapore, 1947).

By late 1948, the tide of the war had turned against the KMT. Large areas of northern and central China had fallen to the CCP, and the country could be split into two halves, like Korea and Germany. Faced with the prospect of a divided China, and not wanting to be shut out of the China trade, several merchants in Singapore decided to trade with communist-controlled areas in northern China, including Manchuria. In February 1949, "certain Singapore Chinese merchants" organised a syndicate worth S$1,000,000 with their business partners in Hong Kong as they were "keen on fostering trade with Communist North China". Lee Kong Chian, a prominent rubber magnate in Singapore, insisted that "in the interest of Malaya's prosperity, trade with China must be encouraged" (Malayan Trade to N. China, 1949). Shipments of rubber from Malaya were dispatched to Hong Kong for transhipment to North China on a barter basis for a return of soya beans from Manchuria. Valuations for barter trade were based on the prices of commodities in Hong Kong (N. China Trade Moves, 1949). By March 1949, all northern Chinese ports held by the CCP were "virtually open to foreign trade" (Chinese Traders Seek Barter with North China, 1949). Tan Keong Choon admitted he was concerned about trading with "two Chinas" when he said:

> After we had set up the branch [in Japan] in 1948, the situation became very tense day by day. At that time, I had a branch in Hong Kong. I sent my men southward from Shanghai to Hong Kong and Guangzhou. My view was that there might be two governments – one north and one south of the Changjiang River. I, therefore, set up a branch in Shamen, Guangzhou. After setting up the branch and before business could be done, all of a sudden the [People's] Liberation Army came and liberated the people in Guangzhou.
>
> (NAS, A000052/24, interview with Tan Keong Choon, reel 5, 30 August 1981, transcript pp. 47–48)

There were other pressing problems that arose from the civil war. The National Government of the ROC established monopolies to control exports. For example, the China Textiles Reconstruction Corporation was given a monopoly over exports, and the new policy upset members of the Singapore Chinese Silk and Textiles Merchants' Association who had built up their pre-war well-known brands through goodwill (S'pore Protest to China, 1947). Merchants were also concerned about the loss of trade from "North China" in May 1949 after Shanghai fell to the CCP and the impact of the war on "South China". The Singapore Chinese Fresh Food and Vegetables Importers' Association reported a reduction of imports by "more than half" from the southern Chinese ports of Guangzhou, Xiamen and Shantou (S'pore-China Trade Fears, 1949). It was not a surprise then, that by August 1949, the local press reported that trade among China, Malaya and Singapore was on the verge of collapse as the conflict had spread to these three ports (Chinese-Malayan Trade is Facing Collapse, 1949).

Business concerns weighed heavily in the minds of the Consul-General and Chinese merchants in Singapore. Wu Paak Sheng, the Consul-General in Singapore, worked to win support for the KMT just as Tan Kah Kee worked to win support for the CCP. In May 1949, Tan left Singapore for good as he now worked wholeheartedly for the CCP and the government the party would install by October. Merchants such as Tan Kah Kee chose to throw in his lot with the CCP and returned home. However, he could do this as his own business empire had collapsed during the Great Depression in 1934 (Yong 1987, 64–65). The Chinese merchants who remained in Malaya and Singapore had no intention of sacrificing their businesses – which had taken decades to build up – and return to China. A new problem soon arose for the merchants, who had to weigh the benefits of conducting the China trade after Mao Zedong proclaimed the founding of the PRC on 1 October 1949. Chinese merchants in Singapore were hopeful that with the KMT blockade of Chinese ports proving less effective, commodities that had been stocked in ports such as Shanghai could be exported "within the next month or two" (Direct S'pore Trade with Reds Likely Soon, 1949).

The new Central People's Government in Beijing continued with the KMT policy of proclaiming itself the representative of all overseas Chinese. In the early days of the new regime, it "devoted much attention" to overseas Chinese affairs and assured them that there would be "favourable circumstances for living" if they returned to China (Zhuang 1998, 15). However, as a communist state, the PRC was now in an ideological conflict with the Western powers in a Cold War. As a British Crown Colony, Singapore was firmly in the camp of the Western powers. Both the colonial authorities and the Labour Front government elected in 1955 were suspicious of the China trade and concerned about its impact on Singapore. The British Secretary of State for the Colonies noted that "the Chinese Government holds Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom responsible for Singapore" (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 1030/609, telegram from

the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir Robert Black, Governor of Hong Kong, 27 December 1958).

Despite the call by Beijing to return home to China, merchants showed little interest in doing so. While the CCP targeted traders within China as "capitalists" or "bourgeoisie" after 1949, it treated overseas Chinese differently. The Malayan economy was a capitalist one and Chinese entrepreneurs – mainly traders, mine owners, rent-capitalists and industrialists – were dominant in Malaya and Singapore. The CCP, therefore, could ill afford to alienate itself from the overseas Chinese by appealing to anti-capitalistic ideals. Beijing encouraged overseas Chinese traders to return to China and conduct trade from within the PRC. These "returned migrants" could be instrumental in the further development of Chinese agriculture and industry. The goods produced in China could then be exported to their clients in Malaya and Singapore. However, for the merchants, especially producers and exporters of Malayan goods such as rubber and tin, the China trade was their livelihood in Singapore, and it had to continue. This became evident when in response to Tan Kah Kee's personal call to overseas Chinese to return to "take part in the socialist reconstruction" of China in June 1956, even his own family chose to remain in Singapore, explaining that overseas Chinese with established businesses in Malaya and Singapore were "not likely to throw these away and return to China" (Tan Kah Kee's Family: We Stay in Malaya, 1956).

2.3 Rubber Embargo

As a Crown Colony, Singapore had to abide by the policies implemented by the British Government in London on trading relations with the PRC. Unfortunately for the Chinese merchants who saw China not as an exporter of goods needed in Malaya and Singapore but a potentially huge market for imports from Malaya and Singapore, a demand by any government in Singapore to suspend the China trade was met with resistance and derision. One example of merchants' frustration with the Singapore authorities concerned the export of Malayan rubber to China.

In October 1950, Chinese troops entered the Korean War on the side of North Korea and crossed the Yalu River. In response, the British government voted in a meeting of the sanctions committee of the United Nations on 15 May 1951 to place an embargo on the export of any "strategic war materials" to the PRC (UK Votes for Ban on Exports to China, 1951). For merchants in Singapore, this decision meant the discontinuation of the export of Malayan rubber to China. *Brown's Malayan Economic Review* opined that "even with an embargo it seems unlikely that China will be prevented from obtaining the rubber she wants, unless a complete blockade of China is enforced" (Anti-China Sanctions Will Hasten Outbreak of War, 1951). That turned out to be prophetic as countries such as Ceylon continued to export rubber to China (No Ceylon Ban on Rubber to Red Countries!, 1951). Other "rubber experts" argued that the embargo would hurt China economically

(UK Rubber Ban is Cutting Indonesia Supplies to China, 1951). A British freighter carrying 3,700 tonnes of rubber en route to China was ordered to return to Singapore on 18 May under the escort of a British destroyer dispatched from Hong Kong (Rubber Ship Halted, 1951).

The embargo hit Chinese exporters in Singapore very hard. After two years, the merchants began calling for the resumption of the China trade. From January to March 1953, "Malaya exported nothing to China" (Malaya is in Need of China's Trade, 1953). However, the merchants were resigned to accept that trade could only resume when the Korean War ended. In June 1953, Lee Kong Chian said that the ban on the export of "strategic materials" should be lifted as "it would serve no purpose if the fighting ended in Korea" (Call for Lifting of Ban to Red China 'Premature', 1953). An armistice was finally signed on 27 July, but the ban on Malayan rubber exports to China was not lifted. By September 1954, rubber dealers in Singapore were in a state of despair and argued that Ceylon and Indonesia were "probably laughing up their sleeves at our embargo" since they were exporting rubber to the PRC (China Doesn't Need OUR Rubber, 1954).

Despite protests by rubber dealers and the Chinese merchants, London refused to lift the ban on Malayan rubber exports in February 1955 (Rubber for China Ban Will Stay, 1955). With the victory by the Labour Front in the general election in Singapore in April 1955, David Marshall was appointed chief minister. He called on London to lift the ban on Malayan rubber exports to China in March 1956 (Lift Ban on Rubber Export Call, 1956). He also called for the normalisation of trade relations with China in May because it would ensure the survival of Singapore's status as an entrepôt port, noting that the "artificial strangulation of normal trade" benefitted other countries in the region (China Trade 'Essential', 1956). Another prominent rubber magnate, Tan Lark Sye, also called on other rubber merchants to negotiate with China quickly "if they did not want to be left behind in the rubber trade" (Speed Up That Mission to China, 1956).

Merchants were, therefore, surprised when, in a sudden change of policy, J. M. Jumabhoy, the Singapore Minister of Commerce and Industry, announced on 4 June 1956 that some restrictions on rubber exports to China would be lifted. He recognised the embargo was "a source of great dissatisfaction to the trade" and announced in the Legislative Assembly two days later that "reasonable quantities" could now be exported to China. Individual applications for rubber exports would be dealt by the Ministry, but "larger quantities" required London's approval. He did not define what were "reasonable" and "larger" quantities (*Singapore Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report: First Session of the First Legislative Assembly*, 6 June 1956, cols. 1951–1952).

The partial lift of the embargo galvanised Chinese merchants to organise a trade mission to China. Marshall, who had just resigned as chief minister on 7 June, was roped in by the merchants as the mission's advisor. The mission was organised by the SCCC and included non-Chinese merchants in Singapore to show that it was not an "overseas Chinese" effort. Arriving in

China, government officials introduced various industrialisation projects to the mission as the latter negotiated for greater trade among the PRC, Malaya and Singapore (Chan 2001, 201–229; Marshall 1996). Marshall, nonetheless, believed that Beijing was not interested in trade *per se*, and that it was more eager to discuss other issues such as citizenship for the Singapore Chinese and the "liberation" of Taiwan (Chan 2001, 223). During the official banquet hosted by Premier Zhou Enlai, Ko Teck Kin, representing the merchants from Singapore, mentioned that the PRC offered new opportunities for trade as it was massively exporting its products and importing raw materials for industrial production (Huanying Xinjiapo Malaiya Maoyi Kaocha Tuan 1956). However, Chinese officials ignored the concerns of the trade mission and insisted that terms of the rubber trade between the PRC, Malaya and Singapore must be on Chinese terms. Beijing would only negotiate with the Singapore Rubber Trade Association (SRTA), an organisation of Singapore Chinese merchants, and not the Singapore Chamber of Commerce Rubber Association, which was recognised internationally. Clearly, Beijing preferred to negotiate with ethnic Chinese merchants. Furthermore, the Chinese officials insisted that no rubber would be purchased unless Malaya and Singapore accepted China's condition that payment be made *after* delivery, an act which went against the norm (China Shocks Rubber Traders, 1956). The mission caved in and accepted the Chinese demands. Within three days, it announced that China had ordered 3,000 tonnes of Malayan rubber worth $6.1 million – the first Chinese order since 1950 (Peking Orders $6 Mil. Rubber, 1956). By the time the mission left Beijing in mid-September, another $25 million worth of business deals were signed, mainly on rubber, rice and other foodstuffs (Mission Moves on to Manchuria, 1956). While the mission hailed its trip to China as a success, it was clear that trade was not on the minds of Chinese officials. From China's perspective, the mission served as the opportune moment to propagate the fruits of revolution by linking trade with politics and attempting to get the mission to support a so-called "liberation" of Taiwan. Zhou told Marshall that "all conservatist *(sic)* rightist thinking will be eliminated by end 1957" (Marshall 1996, 57). While not a member of the mission, Tan Keong Choon knew that "China always viewed her business transactions with Singapore from a political perspective". With the end of private enterprise by the mid-1950s, trade came under the purview of Chinese government officials who were "not very conversant with business transactions" and those who were capable to conducting trade had no real political power (NAS, A000052/24, interview with Tan Keong Choon, reel 22, 8 November 1981, transcript p. 188).

2.4 Search for New Clients

To keep the entrepôt trade and their businesses alive, merchants had to look for new markets for their exports and buyers for their imports. One example is the challenges faced by Chinese tea merchants in Singapore. Before the founding of the PRC in 1949, these merchants were part of a family business

network stretching from Xiamen in Fujian province to Manila, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Batavia (now Jakarta). After 1949, tea plantations and businesses were seized by the communists as part of a campaign against "rich peasants". These merchants, many of them born in Fujian, chose not to go home and remained in Singapore. However, losing the production of tea in Fujian meant they had to find new ways to keep their businesses afloat. The records of the Singapore Chinese Tea Importers and Exporters Association (SCTIEA) showed that they expanded their search for teas to sell in Singapore. They monitored tea prices in Indonesia and encouraged the sale of Taiwanese teas, with particular interest in green teas from Java and semi-fermented oolong teas from Taiwan (Lim 2010).

Yet, for the Singapore Chinese merchants who had invested heavily in the China trade, there was little they could do when Beijing tightened its control over international trade. The PRC implemented its Second Five-Year Plan in 1958 that was focussed on the need to import machinery and other essential commodities, such as steel. The PRC continued to export its "native products", such as tobacco, medicines, tea, porcelain, silk and handicrafts (Ta Kung Pao 1957, 1–10). The PRC, however, demanded its exports to be ordered by a single company in Singapore because it did not want to handle multiple orders. Private enterprise in China had come to a halt with collectivisation and the beginnings of what was to become the Great Leap Forward. The China trade was taken out of the hands of private entrepreneurs with family business networks across China, Malaya and Singapore, and placed into the hands of Chinese government officials working in state enterprises. Overseas Chinese merchants who had returned to China now had to work with state enterprises and become "state-private ownership companies", one of several "steady measures" adopted during the "socialist transformation" of their businesses (Zhuang 1998, 21).

Although the Hong Kong newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* claimed in 1957 that "the economic development in China has created very favourable conditions" (Ta Kung Pao 1957, 24–25) for further development of the China trade for Malaya and Singapore, Beijing made it clear that merchants in Malaya and Singapore could not import Chinese goods on their own. By forcing merchants to organise a single company in their town or city if they wanted to trade with a state enterprise for the purchase, transport and export of Chinese commodities, Beijing had ignored the fact that many Chinese merchants in Singapore had to give up their business deals organised over many decades if they wanted to continue trading with China. The SCTIEA records reveal that tea merchants had to grudgingly organise themselves into a single company to continue ordering Chinese tea. It suggested their frustration at an unreasonable demand from Beijing and they realised the post-1949 regime cared little for overseas Chinese business interests. Under these circumstances, tea merchants in Singapore organised Giam Kay Tea Company (Pte) Ltd in February 1960 to trade with the China Tea Company based in Xiamen (Lim 2010, 182).

There were also the problems with the availability and standards of Chinese goods. Agricultural goods were becoming more expensive because the widespread famine had led to limited production of commodities for export. Chinese products were seen as shoddy and unreliable. Merchants could no longer depend on the China trade to survive. Tea merchants in Malaya and Singapore looked towards Taiwan, India, Ceylon and Indonesia for tea supplies. Silk merchants stopped trading exclusively with China and instead imported silk and other cloths from Japan, India and Burma (Chen and Chen 2008; Lim 2010). Chinese merchants in Singapore survived because they had cast their trading networks wider. Economic reforms in Taiwan also meant that the island had, by the late 1960s, become an economic powerhouse in East Asia. More goods from Taiwan were making an entry into Singapore (Sun 1964, 148). The Chinese merchants could, even with the small quantities imported from Taiwan, continue with the import and sale of goods passed off as "Chinese".

The success of the trade mission to the PRC did not mean improvements in terms of the China trade for Chinese merchants in Singapore. Within two months of the mission members' return to Singapore, Tan Lark Sye lambasted the government of Lim Yew Hock, Marshall's successor as chief minister, for doing little to improve conditions of trade with China. Tan accused the government of placing "unnecessary obstacles" in the China trade and that "we can't afford to discriminate about our buyers but must grab whatever we can get hold of" (What Has Govt. Done? Mr. Tan Hits Out Again, 1956). Seven months later, London announced the end of the ban on British trade with China, giving hope to the Chinese merchants in Singapore even though Jumabhoy could not confirm if the lifting of the embargo would benefit Singapore as most of the 200 items allowed for trade, such as heavy machinery and cars, were not stocked in Singapore (Merchants Hail End of Ban on China Trade as Business Boost, 1957). As local conditions for the China trade relaxed, merchants began importing more Chinese goods. In June 1958, the Singapore Chinaware Merchant Association, representing about 50 importers of Chinese enamel goods, announced the organisation of a corporation comprising 10 merchants to act as agents for the China National Sundries Export Corporation in Shanghai (Colony Importers Organise Trade with China, 1958).

By the end of 1958, however, problems in the China surfaced after the governments of Malaya and Singapore banned the import of Chinese textiles to "safeguard" the Malayan textile industry. An attempt to organise another trade mission to China for talks on Malayan rubber was also rejected by the Singapore government. China stopped purchasing Malayan rubber from August. Merchants in Singapore also received a tip-off from their agents in Hong Kong that China had "temporarily suspended all exports" to Malaya and Singapore. Traders in Hong Kong also got a limited supply of Chinese goods that was "just sufficient for local consumption", implying that Beijing would not expect Hong Kong traders to re-export the goods to Malaya and

Singapore. Merchants were not sure whether Beijing was organising a trade boycott with Singapore. They began hoarding Chinese foodstuffs, resulting in rising prices. A worried importer, speaking anonymously, told *The Straits Times* that "I am worried about this possible boycott, because it would mean that I will have to close my business" (Hoarding of Chinese Goods as Boycott is Imminent, 1958). Merchants eventually found a solution by purchasing Chinese goods in Hong Kong and paid either in Hong Kong dollars or pound sterling, and not Malayan dollars, because Chinese suppliers had stopped collecting direct orders from Malaya and Singapore (Traders Find Way to Get Red China Goods, 1958). Even after Beijing announced it would end its boycott of direct trade in January 1959 after the Singapore government lifted its restrictions on the imports of Chinese textiles, the Singapore Piece Goods Traders Guild remained pessimistic as its chairman believed that there would not be an immediate increase in imports of Chinese textiles (Peking Trade Boycott May End Soon, 1959). In the general election held in Singapore in June 1959, the PAP swept into power and Lee Kuan Yew became prime minister. In September, a 15-man trade mission organised by shipping magnate Tan Choon Sing left for Beijing on an 82-day trip to give Chinese officials an update about new trade policies of the PAP government (15-Man Team Off for Trade Talks in Peking, 1959). The mission, however, annoyed the PAP government as S. Rajaratnam, the Minister of Culture, told the press that "the Government knows nothing of this and has not given its blessing to this so-called mission to Peking" (Trade Team Didn't Go with Govt. Blessing – Mr. R, 1959).

2.5 Closure of the Bank of China

Singapore joined the new Federation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963. A major issue for the Chinese merchants in Singapore, and their counterparts across Malaysia, for the China trade was the relationship between the Singapore government and the Central Government in Kuala Lumpur. Chinese merchants received and made payments for imports and exports from China at the Singapore branch of the Bank of China. However, on 20 January, eight months before the proclamation of Malaysia, the government of Indonesian President Sukarno had announced a policy of *Konfrontasi* (Confrontation) against the new state. China also opposed the formation of Malaysia, calling it a "neo-colonialist plot" (Lee 2006, 637). In January 1965, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai condemned Malaysia in a speech to a visiting Indonesian delegation in Beijing (Lee 2006, 636). The Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Subandrio also received increased Chinese assistance, advice and cooperation in Indonesia's military campaign against Malaysia, but not Chinese military support (Subandrio Fails in Red China: No Military Support, 1965).

Chinese support for Indonesia had one consequence in 1965, when the Central Government in Kuala Lumpur announced the closure of the Singapore branch of the Bank of China. In a speech to university students in Singapore, Malaysian Finance Minister Tan Siew Sin denied that the closure of the bank

would affect the China trade with Malaysia despite protests from Beijing (Lee 1998, 632). The presence of the bank from the PRC had been controversial at the birth of Malaysia, which had no diplomatic relations with the PRC and had an anti-communist government headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman. In December 1963, Tan Siew Sin said in the Malaysian Parliament that the bank could operate in Singapore, but not in Malaya. Under the Malayan Banking Ordinance, banks with 50 per cent foreign ownership could not operate in Malaya; the Bank of China was operating under Singapore laws (Tan: Bank of China May Operate in S'pore But Not Malaya, 1963). A year later, Tan asked why the PAP, a non-communist party, allowed the Bank of China, "an instrument of the Peking Government", to operate in Singapore. Rajaratnam responded that the bank was "an asset to Singapore's economy" and added that "if the Central Government has any information that the bank is being used for propaganda purposes it can take appropriate action". He added that Singapore was dependent on its entrepôt trade and would continue to trade with "good Communist countries" (Bank of China an Asset to S'pore: Raja, 1964).

In June 1965, Prime Minister Lee called on the Central Government to think of the long-term consequences for Malaysia. If the Bank of China were closed, he argued, that would lead to "no trade or negligible trade with China" (Closure of Bank May Lead to No Trade with China: Lee, 1965). On the same day, Tan Siew Sin insisted that the Bank had been warned on 6 April "but to date it has not taken steps to wind up its business" (Bank of China Was Told 10 Weeks Ago…, 1965). He continued to insist that "the disappearance of the Bank of China from Singapore is not going to harm the economy of Singapore" ('Political Motives' Charge by Tan Siew Sin, 1965). Chinese merchants did not agree with Tan. Importers of Chinese goods enjoyed easy credit facilities at the Bank of China. Those of "good standing" were given up to 60 days to pay for their imports, but other banks usually demanded importers settled the balance of payment before they could unload the goods on arrival in Singapore. The closure of the bank would have a severe impact on importers of Chinese goods. Soon Peng Yam, the president of the SCCC, expressed regret that the Central Government had taken such a decision and lamented that "it will take some time before these traders can find another bank willing to give them similar facilities as the Bank of China". Dato Ng Quee Lam, president of the Singapore Rubber Packers' Association, argued that "this closure will certainly not help our efforts to sell more rubber to China" (Traders Will Be Hard Hit Over Credits, 1965). On 6 August, Bank Negara Malaysia announced it would take over the operations of the Bank of China as the latter would have to close on 14 August (Bank Negara Takes Over, 1965).

There was nothing the Chinese merchants could do to prevent the closure of the Bank of China, as this was a decision made by the Central Government. The Lee government in Singapore had to comply. Fortunately for the merchants, Lee went on television and announced the separation of Singapore from Malaysia on 9 August, which meant that the Bank of China would not be

closed after all. One of the first acts of the Lee government after the separation was to reverse the order of the Central Government so that the Bank of China could continue operations as normal (Back to Normal at Bank of China, 1965). The SCCC rejoiced at the announcement of the separation from Malaysia and its president, Soon Peng Yam, called on trade associations, unions, guilds and other organisations to sponsor a "joint celebration of Singapore's independence". He noted the continuation of the work of the Bank of China and told reporters that "businessmen (sic) in general feel very much relieved at the latest local political developments" and that "they hope that the Singapore Government will throw open the doors to trade" (Chamber President Welcomes Separation News, 1965).

2.6 New Malaysian Taxes

When Singapore was part of Malaysia, Chinese merchants in Singapore were also aggrieved with the introduction of new taxes by the Central Government. In his budget speech before the Dewan Rakyat on 25 November 1964, Tan Siew Sin proposed several new "shock measures" to increase national revenue, including introducing a half per cent turnover tax for all businesses, and raising the duty on selected commodities (such as sugar) in Singapore to Malayan levels (Abisheganaden 1964). Three days later, the Singapore Sugar Traders Association appealed to the Central Government to exempt sugar traders from a new 10 cents a pound import duty and opposed the turnover tax on the grounds that they were dependent on business turnovers to survive rather than the "very small" profit margin (Chia 1964). The Lee government opposed the turnover tax due to its detrimental impact on the "sensitive entrepot economy" of Singapore (Lee: How big firms can avoid taxes, 1964). Tan, however, remained unmoved to merchants' concerns, although he agreed to give "widespread exemptions" from the tax for locally produced goods after meeting representatives from the SCCC in Kuala Lumpur in July 1965 (No promises now on turnover tax: Tan to Spore traders, 1965).

After announcing Singapore's separation from Malaysia, Prime Minister Lee announced that the turnover tax would be "scrapped immediately" due to "its injurious effects on trade, economy and the cost of living" (A pledge by Lee: We want to co-operate with Central Govt, 1965). The Dried Goods Guild recorded in its minutes that when the news broke that the taxes had been scrapped, "everyone was overjoyed" and "merchants were relieved" (NAS, Dried Goods Guild records, minutes of the 4th joint meeting of the Executive Committee and staff of the Welfare Department, 20 August 1965). Later that month, the Lee government announced that import duty paid on sugar would be refunded, less two cents per pound, after export (S'pore Decision on Sugar, 1965). The SCCC urged the Lee government to abolish the import duty completely (Remove These Barriers, Says Chamber, 1965). Removing the import duty for sugar took longer, but in March 1966, the government announced it

would refund the import duty in full for exporting manufacturers in order to promote exports (Export Boost for S'pore Sugar Industry, 1966).

2.7 Concerns About the Future of the Entrepôt Trade

An issue that continually concerned Chinese merchants was the sustainability of the entrepôt trade in Singapore. As I mentioned earlier, these merchants had migrated to Singapore before World War II because the trade was so lucrative. As decolonisation and the Cold War progressed in Southeast Asia, and as new local nationalist leaders appeared with different visions for Singapore, merchants assumed that the trade would not be affected. In a speech to the Legislative Assembly on 13 December 1957, Financial Secretary T. M. Hart told members of the chamber that Singapore's main source of income would "always" be from its free entrepôt trade (Colony Will Have to Rely on Free Trade, 1957).

By the time Singapore became a fully self-governing Crown Colony in 1959, it was clear that the role of commercial interests had ended. The new PAP government no longer saw the future of entrepôt trade as crucial for Singapore's economic development. Industrialisation was the road ahead for the new regime, even as the Chinese merchants wanted to continue with free trade. Within a month of the PAP taking office, SCCC President Ko Teck Kin met Prime Minister Lee and stressed the importance of the trade for Singapore, claiming that it contributed about 80 per cent of Singapore's income and barriers to trade should be lifted (Visscher 2007, 138–139). It was clear in the next few years from the government's economic plans that Ko's attempts at persuading Lee had been in vain. The Lee government embarked on an industrialisation programme as its main concern was to reduce unemployment in the state – which, according to official statistics, stood at 45,000 people or "ten per cent of the working population" (Govt. May Control Jobs in the Firms, 1959). The problem had been exacerbated by new migrants from Malaya and the "startling rate of reproduction" (One Malayan Nation – The No. 1 Task of the Government, 1959). Thinking long term, the government believed that entrepôt trade no longer had a future for Singapore. As Deputy Prime Minister Dr Goh Keng Swee said in a radio broadcast on 4 January 1963:

> You all know our businessmen are mostly engaged in trade… The businessman's activities and experience have made Singapore one of the big markets of Asia. Since his experience is mostly in trade, he is unaccustomed to thinking out new pioneering ideas in industry. This is only natural.
>
> (Goh 1963, 5)

The role played by Chinese merchants when Singapore was in Malaysia was largely restricted to using the SCCC as a vehicle to address any problems with

trade. By this time, it was clear to the Chinese merchants that they could not operate independently of the PAP government. In the 1940s and 1950s, when entrepôt trade was crucial to Singapore, Chinese merchants worked to ensure the survival of the trade and their businesses, even if it meant working against the policies and interests of the colonial regime. After 1959, they found they had to work together with the Lee government to ensure the continuation of Singapore's economic development. This meant that the merchants had to step aside and continue with their mercantile work, even as industrialisation started and manufactured goods were exported by the Economic Development Board.

2.8 Conclusion

The PRC did not immediately recognise the independence of Singapore on 9 August 1965, but trade with China was still seen as crucial for the new country. Rajaratnam, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, remarked that Singapore was "most interested in maintaining and consolidating" its trade links with China. The promise of increased trade with China was also made when Lee Kuan Yew "expected to receive approaches from China" (National Archives of Australia [NAA], A1838, 3107/40/109/Part 1, telegram from the Australian High Commission in Singapore to the Department of External Affairs, 11 August 1965; and NAA, A1838, 3107/40/109/Part 1, telegram to the Department of External Affairs, 12 August 1965). As late as December 1965, the PRC still withheld its recognition of Singapore. At a meeting in East Africa, Singapore Deputy Prime Minister Toh Chin Chye was bluntly told by a Chinese ambassador that "the population of less than two million in Singapore had to be considered insignificant compared to the annual population increase of 21 million in China" (NAA, A1838, 3024/11/87 Part 1, telegram from the Second Secretary in the Australian High Commission in Singapore to the Department of External Affairs, 2 December 1965).

Although China refused to recognise Singapore's independence in 1965, trade with China was still considered important for Singapore's political leaders. Their message was that Singapore welcomed the trade, but it should be on Singapore's terms as an independent sovereign state. Twelve days after independence, Foreign Affairs Minister Rajaratnam said that Singapore was "most interested in maintaining and consolidating" trade links with all countries so long as they "recognise our independence and political integrity" (We Are Most Interested in China Trade: Rajaratnam, 1965). Consequently, the SCCC had to abort another attempt to organise a trade mission to China. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew "complained" to W. B. Pritchett, the Australian High Commissioner to Singapore, that "many of those wishing to join the mission were interested only in making a quick personal profit with cheap Chinese imports" (NAA, A1838, 3024/11/87 Part 1, letter from the Australian High Commissioner to Singapore to the Department of External Affairs, 1 October 1965).

It was also clear to Chinese merchants that, in the long run, the trade that had served their business interests so well was not sustainable. Yap Ee Chian recalled:

> Businessmen involved in the entrepot trade would lose money in the long run. The hope for Singapore to succeed lies in industrialisation. … Entrepot trade will not be a successful business. Every country has its own industries and factories. Our exports to them will be rejected. Previously, we exported things to them, but not now. They now impose restrictions and refuse importation of our goods. This is the end of the entrepot trade.
>
> (NAS, interview with Yap Ee Chian, B000043/08, reel 8, 20 August 1980, transcript p. 86)

The days when the entrepôt trade was key to Singapore's economic success were coming to an end, even as Chinese merchants in Singapore continued to clamour for better conditions of the trade with China. By 1968, with the industrialisation programme in full swing, Singapore moved to an export-oriented economy. Chinese merchants were side-lined as the Singapore government promoted Singapore as a trading hub through the Economic Development Board.

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3 Trading Hub Beyond Ideologies

The Singapore-North Korean Economic Connection and Mission for Industrialisation during the Cold War

JongHo Kim

3.1 Introduction

During the period from the 19th to the mid-20th century, colonial Singapore played a central role in facilitating the trade of commodities in Asia. In 1965, Singapore, as a newly independent country, aimed to preserve its colonial position in Asia and other regions (Chua 1977; Soon and Tan 1993; Huff 1994; Bruton 1996; Huff 1999; Heng 2011; Sugimoto 2011; Lim 2015). This chapter contends that Singapore's elites effectively preserved their status, extending their success beyond the ideological conflict of the Cold War. Consequently, even communist countries such as the Soviet Union, China, North Vietnam, and North Korea sought access to Singapore for the purposes of promoting the socialist bloc's commercial trade. In the 1950s and 1960s, North Korea stood out among Asian countries for its exceptional industrial achievements in various sectors, such as synthetic fabrics, machinery, underground resources, and heavy machinery, a fact that has been supported by multiple studies (Kim 2001; Hwang 2005; Kim 2007; Lee 2013; Kim 2015; Yang 2015; Miller 2016; Lee 2019; Jo 2021; Kim 2021; Woo 2022; Lee 2022a). Less widely recognised is the fact that the leaders of North Korea aimed to utilise Singapore as a means to export industrial goods and propagate economic achievements diplomatically, over not only South Korea but also other countries.

Although there has been significant attention on Singapore's diplomatic and security concerns regarding its relationship with North Korea after 1975, there has been a lack of historical studies examining North Korea's relationship with Singapore, and even more so Southeast Asia. There was limited research done on the relationship between North Korea and Singapore before 1975, the year when they exchanged ambassadors. Some studies on North Korean diplomacy briefly mention the rivalry between North and South Korea or the socialist connections with Vietnam and Cambodia (Hong 1995; Park 2003; Bridges 2017; D. Kim 2020; S. Kim 2020). In addition, there has been no research conducted on the historical relationship between Singapore and North Korea. It is important to note that there have been few investigations into the relationship between Southeast Asia and other Northeast Asian communities, including South Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The challenge

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in studying North Korea's relationship with Southeast Asia primarily stems from the scarcity of information and data released by North Korea. Furthermore, the volume and significance of North Korea's trade with Southeast Asia is comparatively smaller relative to its trade with other regions.

This chapter aims to focus on North Korea's economic ties with Southeast Asia, which have been largely overlooked in Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian studies. It attempts to reconstruct the history of the relationship between North Korea and Singapore during the Cold War by focusing on newly discovered primary sources, such as Singaporean and North Korean newspaper articles, diplomatic records of the South Korean government concerning the close relationship between two countries, and other related sources. As previously stated, the majority of studies on North Korea's foreign relations during the Cold War have concentrated on socialist connections. This study examines the relationship between North Korea and Singapore with a particular emphasis on its significance in understanding the Third World international cooperation in the Cold War context. It challenges the prevailing stereotyped notion of North Korean foreign relations by demonstrating that it was, in fact, multifaceted. Moreover, it offers a perspective on economic cooperation and exchanges among Third World states that transcended ideological considerations during the Cold War period.

All of this cannot be fully understood without placing it in the context of Singapore's transition from a colonial city-state to a nation-state with the onset of the Cold War following World War II, as well as the peculiarities and dilemmas Singapore faced in its early economic development. Ultimately, this paper seeks to investigate the geo-economic power of Singapore even beyond the ideological conflicts of the Cold War and uncover the hidden characteristics of Singapore's economic connection with North Korea in terms of its mission to expand trade and promote industrialisation.

3.2 Ideological Support and Cooperation: The North Korean-Singapore Relationship before 1965

Little is known about the relationship between North Korea and Singapore after the establishment of the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) in the post-war period (1948) and before Singapore's independence in 1965. Although Singapore had been self-governing since 1959, it was still a colony with a strong British influence, so it was difficult to have any formal ties with communist states. It even served as the main rear base for the British campaign on the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War. According to the visual archives of the National Archives of Singapore, the British stationed fighter planes in Singapore during the Korean War, stored large amounts of timber for the war effort, and recruited Indians to serve in its military.[1]

Britain, along with the United States, was extremely wary of the widespread impact of communism in Southeast and East Asia, also known as the "domino effect," and, in the wake of the Korean War, was the leading First World *liberal*

camp state to pursue a strategy of containment of the Communist Bloc, which included China, the Soviet Union, North Korea, and North Vietnam. It was also the first country to impose martial law to counter communist military forces, doing so in Malaya where it deemed the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) as potentially disruptive following Britain's return to the Malayan region to reassert colonial control shortly after the end of World War II (Kheng 1983; Kheng 2012). Recently, the prominent British newspaper, *The Guardian*, discovered secret documents that appear to show that agents sent by Britain during the 1965 anti-communist mass killings in Indonesia carried out propaganda work that fuelled that tragic incident (Lashmar 2021).

However, there are some sources, albeit limited, in the private sector that provide a picture of Singapore's Chinese community's various engagements with North Korea and, more broadly, with communist states. A case in point is a secret report on Singapore sent to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on August 30, 1950, shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950. It describes how the editors of the *Nanyang Xiangpau* 南洋商報, a leading Chinese private newspaper in Singapore, had expressed support for North Korea's military actions on the distant Korean Peninsula.[2] *Nanyang Xiangpau* was founded by Tan Kah Kee 陳嘉庚, a rubber tycoon, and had a wide following throughout the Malay Peninsula, the Straits Settlements, and Indonesia, as one of the most influential overseas Chinese morning newspapers in all of Southeast Asia. Its board of directors included Tan's son-in-law Lee Kong Chian 李光前 and Tan Lark Sye 陳六使, and the paper's support for North Korea's military action was clearly related to Tan Kah Kee's pro-communist stance (Yong 2014; Lim 2017).

However, these examples do not indicate that the Chinese community in Singapore had an intensive relationship with North Korea, but rather that they displayed some ideological support for the communist People's Republic of China, established in 1949. In fact, there were occasions when Singapore's Chinese community had shown a neutral or pro-Chinese stance, contrary to British intentions, such as the SCCC (Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce) attempt to reopen Sino-Singapore trade in 1956 (Lim 2012). The Chinese mercantile community in Singapore attempted to trade with China even though the British government, along with the United States, was maintaining a strategy of blockade towards China. However, the attempt was unsuccessful, largely due to the authoritarian attitude of the Chinese communist government in dealing with capitalists and the failure of negotiations over the status of overseas Chinese in Singapore. In addition, Tan Kah Kee and other Singaporeans were monitored by the CIA for smuggling resources and machinery parts to the Soviet Union, China, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.[3] Furthermore, as communist movements grew in Southeast Asia, Singapore's labour unions and students began to oppose any external influences such as British control and American intervention in Singapore. These events demonstrate that following the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the Korean War, the political and social dynamics in Singapore began to explode within the context of the Cold War, something the North Korean government observed closely, as seen below (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 List of North Korean News Articles on Singapore Situation until 1965

Newspaper	*Headline*	*Date*
Minju Choson (Democratic Joseon)	New Law of Press Suppression Implemented in Singapore	August 12, 1951
Rodong sinmun (Workers Daily)	Strike by Asian Dock Workers in Singapore	January 9, 1953
Rodong sinmun	Strike by Bus Company Workers in Singapore	May 17, 1955
Rodong sinmun	Singapore Students Alliance Takes Leave of Absence Action	May 23, 1955
Rodong sinmun	70,000 Singapore Transport and Factory Workers Strike	June 16, 1955
Rodong sinmun	At the end of December, the General Secretary of the Malay Communist Party Held a Meeting with the Malay and Singaporean Prime Ministers	December 18, 1955
Rodong sinmun	Independence Movement Week in Singapore	March 16, 1956
Rodong sinmun	Call for Immediate Independence from Singapore's Legislative Assembly	April 13, 1956
Minju Choson	Singapore-British Talks End in Failure due to British Machinations	May 19, 1956
Minju Choson	Support the Independence Movement of the Singapore People from Asian Countries	May 29, 1956
Rodong sinmun	People's Action Party of Singapore Condemns British Authorities' Repressive Measures	June 29, 1956
Rodong sinmun	Crowds Rally Demanding Independence of Singapore	July 29, 1956
Rodong sinmun	Singapore Government's Provocative Actions	September 29, 1956
Rodong sinmun	Dismiss British Advisers and Officials in Singapore	December 27, 1956
Minju Choson	Public Opinion in Each Country Strongly Condemns the Landing of US troops in Singapore	August 26, 1958
Rodong sinmun	US Fleet Moves out of Singapore under Pressure from World Opinion	August 28, 1958
Rodong sinmun	Stop the Repression of Singapore's Patriots	February 12, 1963
Rodong sinmun	Strike by 60,000 workers in Singapore	October 12, 1963
Rodong sinmun	Singapore Newspaper Welcomes Cambodia's Rejection of the US "Aid"	December 18, 1963
Rodong sinmun	31 Trade Union Organizations in Singapore Announce an Appeal for Anti-"Malaysia"	May 11, 1964

(*Continued*)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Newspaper	*Headline*	*Date*
Rodong sinmun	Our People's Unity Organization and Singapore's Political and Social Groups Issue a Statement Condemning "Malaysia"	September 24, 1964
Rodong sinmun	Singapore Withdraws from Malaysia	August 11, 1965
Rodong sinmun	Singapore's Secession from Malaysia Demonstrates the Failure of US and British Imperialist Policies towards Southeast Asia: Broadcasting Speech of the Indonesian Communist Party Chairman	August 13, 1965
Rodong sinmun	Instrument of Colonialism, Malaysia will Eventually Collapse: Joint Statement of the Socialist Front People's Party of Singapore	August 13, 1965
Rodong sinmun	The People of Asia should Unite against US Imperialism, which is Reviving Japanese Militarism: Pointed out by Singapore Newspaper	December 11, 1965

Table 3.1 shows that North Korea's major interest regarding Singapore from 1950 to 1965 concerned ideological support for leftist movements, such as worker strikes, student movements, and other communist-related activism. At the same time, these North Korean newspapers condemned the United States, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia in the context of the Cold War and in the name of anti-imperialism/colonialism. This time, North Korea saw Singapore as a place where the socialist movement among the residents and external forces clashed, as well as a symbol of the Cold War and Asian decolonisation, thus ideologically, North Korean leaders observed and tracked the situation in Singapore. Moreover, North Korea used Singapore's independence in 1965 to attack the *liberal* side, particularly the United Kingdom and Malaysia, interpreting this event as a sort of people's liberalisation from imperialism and liberalism.

The different attitudes of North Korea and Singapore towards each other prior to Singapore's independence in 1965 can be explained by the nature of the regimes established in each country and their policy orientation under the logic of the Cold War. In the case of Singapore elites, who were gradually moving towards self-reliance and independence, they had to adapt to the British and American-led international order in terms of economic aid and security, while at the private level there was socialist activism and sympathy with China's communisation among Singapore's Chinese population, particularly the working class and students. On the other hand, North Korea, a socialist state born of the division of the Korean Peninsula, under the dictatorship of

the Kim family and the Communist Party arbitrarily interpreted Singapore's move towards independence as a challenge to the U.S.- and U.K.-led liberal international order. These divergent perspectives converged sharply as Singapore gained independence. At the time, the economic cooperation between two countries was a critical link.

3.3 Economic Cooperation between Singapore and North Korea after 1965

With Singapore's independence in 1965, the nature of the relationship between Singapore and North Korea shifted from ideological alignment to economic cooperation. Through an examination of diverse primary sources from Singapore, the United States, North Korea, and South Korea, this study found there were four main events in the two countries' economic cooperation prior to the signing of official diplomatic relations between the two states in 1975: trade missions, trade agreements, goodwill delegations, and trade exhibitions.

3.3.1 The First Trade Mission from North Korea to Singapore in October 1966

From the October 15 to November 11, 1966, a three-member North Korean trade mission visited Singapore to investigate the possibilities of expanding bilateral trade between Singapore and North Korea. This was the first trade mission from North Korea and the first case of a communist country sending an official delegation to newly independent Singapore. It was not an official trade mission, but a semi-governmental one. According to the *Straits Times*, the mission members were[4]:

a Mr. Li Eung Gu, leader of the mission and vice president of the Korea Metal and Chemical Export and Import Corporation
b Mr. Li Sung Hoon, executive in the Export and Import Corporation
c Mr. Pai Yong Duck, representative of a food company

The main goal of this one-month mission was to find ways and means to promote bilateral trade between the two countries. Li Eung Gu, the mission leader, told Chinese merchants in Singapore at a dinner meeting hosted by the SCCC that North Korea was "prepared to have normal trade relations" with Singapore and to conclude short-term and long-term agreements.[5] C. H. Tong, the vice president of the SCCC, responded that North Korea's rapid development of industrial output since its pre-industrial days should be noted. The North Korean trade mission announced at the farewell party that they "concluded several business contracts based on mutual benefits" and would recommend that the government establish official trade representatives in the

region.[6] It was the beginning of the two countries' economic cooperation, which would lead to their ongoing relationship.

3.3.2 Trade Agreement between Singapore and North Korea in May 1967

Just after the trade mission in late 1966, Singapore and North Korea signed a trade agreement on May 13, 1967.[7] The official government trade delegation, led by Kim Suk Jin, director-general of the External Ministry of Commerce, visited Singapore from April 26 to May 15 of that year to sign the trade agreement between the two countries.[8] According to the news article, North Korea already had exported mechanical equipment, various metals, chemical goods, minerals, and ginseng products to Singapore while Singapore exported rubber, shellac, tin, fat, and oil.[9] This first trade agreement between the two countries, which was signed by Kok Ah Loy, director of the Department of Trade of Singapore's Finance Ministry, on behalf of the Singapore government and Kim Suk Jin on behalf of North Korea, included the following provisions: 1. trade representations would be established in both countries; 2. the volume of trade in the first year would amount to 200 million pounds of goods; 3. North Korea would be obliged to import Singapore-produced goods equal to the entire amount of North Korean goods exported to Singapore.[10] Following the agreement, on January 12, 1968, a North Korean trade office was set up in Singapore, led by Bak Su Kwon, the first ever trade representative in Singapore.[11]

Interestingly, the third condition of the agreement was a key demand of the Singapore government to the two Koreas (South and North) in negotiating trade agreements that would promote their own industrial infrastructure. While North Korea accepted this condition easily because its economic structure was totally controlled by the state as a one-party totalitarian politico-economic system, South Korea could not accept this kind of condition because the produced goods of South Korea and Singapore, notably light industrial products, were almost the same. This difference is a key reason North Korea was able to lead in the Korean competition for the Singapore market. According to a report of the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were three primary reasons the two Koreas each sought to establish a bilateral trade relationship with Singapore: 1. geopolitical location: located between Malaysia and Indonesia, it was an optimal port from which to secure the natural resources of those two states; b. trading hub Singapore was ideal for use as a trading hub to export manufactured goods; c. ideological competition: Singapore was neutral in its foreign relations and in the arena of ideological competition. The report proposed the South Korean government to strengthen its position in Singapore, economically, diplomatically, and ideologically.[12]

After the trade agreement was signed, North Korean products made a huge impact on the local market in Singapore. A New Zealand trade mission in October 1967 reported, "We have discovered that since the visit of our trade mission 18 months ago, China and North Korea have cornered several lines of

consumer goods in Singapore which were formerly held by our manufacturers. In certain cases, we have completely lost the business because of the dumping prices of Chinese and North Korean products. It appears to us that the two countries are selling their products at unrealistic prices in an all-out effort to earn foreign exchange."[13] A South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs agent report on the North Korea–Singapore trade agreement had in fact already raised the alarm regarding the possibility of North Korea dumping products.[14]

3.3.3 North Korea's Goodwill Delegation to Singapore in June 1968

The official North Korean goodwill delegation that stayed in Singapore for nine days, from June 29, 1968, symbolised the closer relationship between Singapore and North Korea. Kang Ryang Wook (1904–1983), leader of the delegation, was the highest-ranking official and the first ever VIP to visit Singapore from an Asian communist country.[15] Kang was an important figure in North Korean history in terms of the Christian movement and education policies. As a relative of Kim Il-sung, the founding father and then-president of North Korea, he was also Kim's teacher during his teenage years. After the establishment of DPRK, Kang forced all the various Christian parties in North Korea to be regulated by the state and had been in charge of controlling the combined Christian society in North Korea. Kang was an appropriate choice to lead such a state visit, a high-ranking official familiar with international order and a prominent figure in the North Korean Communist Party. In fact, Kang was vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly upon his arrival, but the Singapore government and news agencies acknowledged him as the vice president of North Korea, ranking just below Kim Il-sung. The fact is that Kang was only nominated as vice president after returning home. But for the diplomatic consideration, it seems North Korea informed Singapore that Kang's position was vice president.

According to a South Korean report, this delegation had a nine-day schedule that involved visiting highly modernised destinations, such as the HDB (Housing Development Board), Jurong Industrial Complex, a television broadcasting station, the National Theatre, a hospital, and harbour facilities.[16] Another report identified nine members of the delegation: a. Kang Ryang Wook, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly; b. Jin Mun-Dek, minister of urban development; c. Bang Tai-Il, vice minister of foreign affairs; d. Jin Choong-Kuk, board director of Foreign Affairs; e. Han Eung-Cho, the vice director of the Supreme People's Assembly; f. Shin Byung-Chul, senior officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; g. Kim Hee-Dal, a doctor; h. Kim Choong-Il, a senior officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and i. Kim Duk-Hyun, a journalist.[17]

Lee Kwan Yew, the prime minister of Singapore, and government ministers, welcomed the delegation at the airport. Upon arrival, Kang released a statement to the public, which clearly shows the perspective of North Korean

elites on this trade connection. “The friendship and solidarity between Korea and Singapore are an integral part of the friendship and solidarity of the Asian peoples who oppose imperialism and colonialism…. The industrious people of Singapore have achieved many successes in their work against foreign aggression and the interference in their internal affairs, and for consolidating national independence and developing the national economy of the country.”[18] In its coverage of the event, a North Korean newspaper pointed out how Kang highlighted the North Korea’s achievement of developing a socialist industrial-agriculture state with a self-supporting national economy through the leadership of the greatest leader, Kim Il-sung, and 40 million North Korean people.[19]

Just after arriving in Singapore, Kang and some members of the delegation were invited to Istana Palace for a banquet and meeting with Wee Chong Jin, the acting president of Singapore. The notable discussion between Wee and Kang clearly revealed the different perspective of both sides on economic cooperation between the two countries.[20] Kang condemned the U.S. intention to colonise South Korea as a military base for the occupation of North Korea and declared: “As long as US imperialism occupies South Korea, the Korean people cannot live in peace and the unification of Korea cannot be realised.” Wee responded: “In these times of momentous changes when universal concepts of human society are in conflict, the sad fact is that the world continues to be divided not only on political lines but also on ethnic and racial lines… We have, therefore, despite many difficulties ordered our foreign relations on the basis of being friends with all those who wish to be friends with us and who acknowledge the fact of our independence and our right to build a way of life according to what our people want.”[21] Wee revealed that Singapore would focus on more practical areas beyond ideology, like trade and the economy, for fruitful cooperation.

Singapore government and society were also cautious about this trade relationship in the Cold War context, seeking to balance trade and international politics.[22] “In a world where there is an excess of ideology, Singapore has striven to cultivate friendly ties with all countries which are willing to reciprocate. The attitude is pragmatic and consequently is concerned more with results than with theories.”[23] From this perspective, Singapore believed North Korea correctly responded to the trading conditions that Singapore demanded, which will be described as below. Singapore’s leadership also clearly knew it was impossible “to draw a line between trade and politics” but, from a realistic perspective, Singapore should do business with all comers as a centre of trade because Singapore’s prosperity was “tied up with the steady expansion of trade.”[24] Singapore’s trade connection with North Korea presented a dilemma and Singapore’s answer was to balance trade and politics. According to a South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs report, Kang and the North Korean trade delegation demanded a press conference to be broadcast by both radio and television, but Singapore rejected it. This also reveals Singapore’s efforts to balance trade and politics.[25]

Kang and the delegation undertook an in-depth examination of Singapore's industrial infrastructure, to include the Jurong Industrial Complex, wharfs, the Jurong shipyard, and iron and steel mills. After two-hour tours of these industrial sites, Kang stated that "from the experience we have had in our country, I am confident that Jurong will make a contribution to the development of your country's commerce and industry."[26] This statement reveals North Korean self-confidence concerning its own industrial performance, one of the reasons Singapore sought economic cooperation with North Korea. Following the North Korean delegation to Singapore, Singapore also dispatched a delegation to participate in celebrating the 20th anniversary of the founding of North Korea, while also looking around the Chun Li Ma (Chollima) Factory and Chun Li Ma Steel Wire and Mill Complex from September 13 to 16, 1968.

3.3.4 North Korean Trade Exhibition in Singapore, 1969

In late January 1969, the North Korean government dispatched an eight-man team to prepare for a trade exhibition in Singapore.[27] Kim Tai Ruin, the deputy leader of the team, pointed out that "trade between two countries in 1968 was worth about $30 million, which was 20 times greater than in 1967."[28] He stated that North Korea hoped to import more rubber, tin, and locally made leather shoes and shirts from Singapore. This clearly shows that North Korea and Singapore dealt with exchangeable commodities, like North Korean heavy chemical industry products and Singapore's rubber and tin, brought in from Malaysia and Indonesia, and light industrial products. In short, they were able to pursue mutually beneficial trade. On the other hand, South Korea dealt with almost the same commodities as Singapore. South Korea only regarded Singapore as a trading hub while Singapore needed to promote their own industrial output, so it was challenging for the two countries to find a way of signing any trade agreement that included the special stipulation of the Singapore government that was noted earlier.

In this context, the first North Korean trade exhibition opened at the Shenton Way exhibition site of the Light Industries Services and for two weeks showcased over 3,000 items, ranging from machinery and foodstuffs to porcelain. The main purpose of the exhibition, according to its director Choi Taik Jun, was to "develop friendship and trade ties between two countries."[29] The displayed products included heavy machinery, metal, chemical products, mineral ores, building materials, chemically processed North Korean textile known as Vinalon, ceramics, handicrafts, glassware, and tobacco. Within the first three days, beginning on February 25, 1969, $10 million worth of commodities were ordered by local businessmen.[30]

Even by the time the exhibition opened, North Korea had already received orders worth $100,000 from local businessmen, which revealed the interest of local businesses in North Korean heavy industry.[31] On March 5, Dr. Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's finance minister and an architect of the

Singaporean economy, made a 30-minute visit to the exhibition guided by Bang Tai Ryul, North Korea's minister of foreign affairs, and Bak Su Kwon, a trade representative in Singapore. Goh was given a presentation on drilling and shaping machines, leading him to remark, "One can see that the technology achieved by Korea is advanced."[32] According to a spokesman for the exhibition, machinery, including centre and bench lathes, and medicines had attracted the most attention. The exhibition closed on March 10, 1969. All told, orders placed by more than 20 companies at the exhibition amounted to over $15 million.[33]

A North Korean news article also reported on this trade exhibition in Singapore but only focused on the leadership of Kim Il-sung in the areas of industrial development, stating that people all over the world were surprised by, and praised, his great leadership.[34] This revealed that the major purpose behind North Korea's connection to Singapore was not to display its industrial products per se, but rather to display its ideological superiority. On November 28, 1968, the Singapore and North Korean governments agreed to establish consular relations, and the North Korean Consul General in Singapore began operations from the first day of the following month. The official letter from Bak Sung Cheol, the North Korean minister of foreign affairs, to S. Rajaratnam, Singapore's minister of foreign affairs, reveals clearly the ultimate perspective of North Korea on this relationship: "The establishment of consular relations between our two countries will contribute to further strengthening and developing the friendly and cooperative ties between our two peoples, ties which were forged in the joint struggle to oppose imperialism and colonialism, to consolidate national independence, and to preserve peace in Asia."[35] North Korean communist leaders regarded Singapore, the Asian and global trading hub of people, capital, commodities, and even ideologies, as a gateway or market to convey or display socialist-based industrial performance during the Cold War.

3.4 Singapore's Industrial Development as Survival Versus North Korean Industrial Development as Propaganda

The thrust of Singapore's foreign policy was clear: no trade agreement, no diplomatic relations, including consular relations. Just after a series of economic exchanges with North Korea between 1966 and 1969, Singapore established consular relations with that country, while South Korea still struggled to establish diplomatic relations with Singapore, even trade representatives and official work spaces for them, because South Korea could not accept the demand of Singapore regarding a trade agreement, in particular, the condition that South Korea should purchase Singapore-manufactured goods equal in value to its exports to Singapore. This was a strategy of Singapore to boost industrial development using diplomacy.[36] In this context, in the late 1960s, North Korea, rather than South Korea, was a rising counterpart to Singapore's foreign and economic relations. This is evidenced by the fact that North Korea was listed in the Diplomatic and Consular List published by Singapore's Ministry of Foreign

Affairs under the name of "Korea," clearly showing that the Singapore government regarded North Korea as the representative among the two Koreas.[37] Another factor explaining Singapore's preference for connecting to North Korea was the latter's industrial development, which Singapore aimed to duplicate.

3.4.1 North Korea's Motivation for Propagating Its Heavy Chemical Industry in Singapore

Socialist foreign trade experienced significant growth during the 1950s, particularly in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The socialist intellectuals and politicians in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe aimed to enhance trade by achieving a harmonious distribution of industrial growth among socialist nations. The theory referred to here is known as the socialist international division of labour theory. According to this theory, the socialist camp was perceived as a vast cooperative entity that was intricately interconnected (Lee 2022b). Consequently, the countries that achieved success in industrialisation were permitted to persist in their current state, while other countries with lower levels of industrialisation were to concentrate on agriculture and the mining of natural resources. The Soviet Union and Eastern European states, known for their significant industrialisation, sought to engage in trade by offering their industrial goods in exchange for agricultural products from less-developed nations. Essentially, it was a trade system that prioritised Europe and revolved around the Soviet Union. Unsurprisingly, this hindered the efforts of less developed socialist nations, particularly in Asia, to achieve industrialisation, and was met with opposition from those countries.

This was a point over which North Korea and the Soviet Union clashed. Kim Il-sung's attitude throughout the 1950s was that the immediate increase in agricultural production was only for the self-sufficiency of manufacturing, and that the ultimate goal of North Korea was economic growth centred on heavy chemical industries, including the metal, chemical, and fishery processing industries. North Korea's position was to engage in the global allocation of work within the socialist bloc, while exporting goods based on its own economic blueprint, rather than adhering to the role previously imposed by the Soviet Union (Lee 2022b). North Korea experienced rapid growth in this sector in the 1950s as a result of a policy that prioritised the heavy industry (Lee 2013).

North Korea has not officially released economic statistics since the mid-1960s. For this reason, most of the economic statistics related to North Korea released by South Korea's Ministry of Unification (Tongilbu) and its Bank of Korea can be characterised as estimations made by domestic experts and various ministries. However, as shown in Table 3.2, economic statistics were published until the early 1960s. In this respect, looking at the process of North Korea's economic growth, the share of agriculture was 59 per cent in 1946, while the share of industry increased to 57 per cent in 1960 and then 62 per cent in 1964, indicating that the country was promoting an economic development model centred on industrialisation. In addition, the development

Table 3.2 North Korean Gross Production of Society by Sector, 1946–1964

Year	*Gross production of society*	*Industry*	*Agriculture*	*Transportation and postal*	*Fundamental construction*	*Commodity distribution*	*Others*
1946	812	188	480	13	-	97	33
	100%	23.2%	59.1%	1.6%	-	12%	4.1%
1949	1,779	633	722	51	128	167	76
	100%	35.6%	40.6%	2.9%	7.2%	9.4%	4.3%
1953	1,357	416	564	50	202	81	42
	100%	30.7%	41.6%	3.7%	14.9%	6%	3.1%
1956	2,856	1,145	759	114	351	308	177
	100%	40.1%	26.6%	4%	12.3%	10.8%	6.2%
1960	6,682	3,815	1,577	147	581	400	160
	100%	57.1%	23.6%	2.2%	8.7%	6%	2.4%
1962	8,398	5,122	1,788	235	644	302	201
	100%	61%	21.3%	2.8%	9.1%	3.6%	2.2%
1963	9,191	5,569	1,976	257	845	349	193
	100%	60.6%	21.5%	2.8%	9.2%	3.8%	2.1%
1964	10,110	6,298	1,951	283	990	384	202
	100%	62.3%	19.3%	2.8%	9.8%	3.8%	2%

Note: Unit: million North Korean won.

Source: Tongilbu (1996, 123–124).

of the heavy and chemical industries, to include chemicals, machinery, and steel, was emphasised by North Korea using various mineral resources such as coal and iron ore (Tongilbu 1996; Jo 2021; Kim 2021). North Korea's Kim Il-sung had already declared to the Workers' Party Central Committee in 1955 that he would go "to the foundation of socialist construction, that is, the road to heavy industrialisation" (Cha 2013, 16). On the other hand, in South Korea, the share of agriculture in the national economy was around 40 per cent until 1963, while the share of the manufacturing and construction industries was around 15 per cent, and heavy and chemical industries showed a lower development (EPB 1970). In other words, North Korea was producing results in economic development based on its heavy and chemical industrial foundations, which were ahead of their South Korean counterparts, and this proved a noteworthy moment for Singapore's officials and politicians who were seeking the economic development as an independent nation-state and finding a model of heavy and chemical industry-led development.

However, North Korean industrial growth slowed gradually in the 1960s because, while the economic growth was made possible through consumption control and mass mobilisation, it was hampered by the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and the negative effects of internal mobilisation. North Korea began to open up to the outside world in the 1970s, borrowing from the liberal camp and attempting to achieve balanced development by expanding agriculture and light industry (Kwon 2012). In the 1960s, the North Korean state monopolised the growth of its heavy chemical industry and used it for trade, but this changed in the 1970s.

During the late 1960s, North Korea had aimed to redefine its position within the socialist camp by promoting its industrialisation strategy and selling its heavy chemical industry achievements and products to other countries through an economic connection with Singapore. This move was a deliberate attempt to break free from the role assigned to North Korea by the Soviet Union. Indeed, in 1971, North Korea published two advertisements in Singapore's prominent Chinese-language newspaper, *Sin Chew Jit Poh* 星洲日報 (on September 5 and 9) to promote its system, coinciding with the country's 23rd anniversary. The September 5 English-language advertisement featured in the Chinese newspaper clearly demonstrated an explicitly propagandistic intent. The advertisement promoted Kim Il-sung's leadership, emphasised the superiority of North Korea's socialist system, highlighted the propagation of the Juche ideology, and showcased the country's achievements in industrialisation.

On September 9, a double-page spread featuring a range of photographs was utilised to showcase Kim Il-sung's leadership. The photographs included images of the "Chun Li Ma" (Chollima) movement, as well as various energy, machinery, and chemical plants associated with it.[38] The series of advertisements presented here illustrate that North Korea utilised the Singaporean press to highlight its industrial accomplishments. These advertisements, published in both Chinese and English, indicated that the propaganda campaign

targeted not only South Korea but the entire socialist camp. The format of trade exhibition of North Korean industrial products held in 1969 was also organised with the primary objective of promoting and disseminating the country's industrial accomplishments in Singapore.

3.4.2 Motivation of Singapore as a Socialist Trading Hub and as Industrial Developmental State

In the economic cooperation between North Korea and Singapore in the late 1960s, as outlined previously, North Korea aimed to promote its domestically produced heavy chemical industry products to socialist countries for propaganda purposes. Conversely, the Singaporean government had two primary motivations for actively seeking economic collaboration with North Korea: 1. the potential to establish itself as a prominent centre for global trade among socialist nations and 2. the opportunity to leverage North Korea's extensive expertise in the chemical industry, science, and technology.

During this period, the South Korean government was particularly focused on the North Korea–Singapore relationship. Its diplomatic records from that time cited a press conference held by then–Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, which was reported in Singapore's local newspaper, *Nanyang Siangpau* 南洋商報 on August 4, 1966. In that interview, Lee Kuan Yew said, "We want to expand economic relations with other countries.... We aim to enhance our trade relations with other nations as we fully recognise the significance of economic trade. Similarly, this applies to trade relations with communist nations, trade relations with Eastern European countries, and trade relations with the Soviet Union. South Korea would like to send a delegation as well, and North Korea would be able to come as well."[39]

Since 1949, the CIA had documented the presence of a Soviet trade commissioner in Singapore who acquired rubber, electronics, and other goods in the region.[40] The National Archives of Singapore also possesses documentation pertaining to the trade and diplomatic interactions between the Singapore and the Soviet Union since the establishment of Singapore in 1965. In 1965, Singapore dispatched its deputy prime minister and other officials to the Soviet Union for a visit focusing on science and technology. Additionally, in August 1967, a three-member trade delegation from the Soviet Union visited Singapore for 10 days, with the aim of boosting bilateral trade.[41] A trade agreement had previously been ratified in April 1966, and subsequently, trade representative offices were established in both nations (Hong 2006). In 1969, the Soviet Union appointed its inaugural ambassador to Singapore, and in 1971, Singapore responded by appointing an ambassador to the Soviet Union. This can be perceived as Singapore's distinctive diplomatic alliance, which established a trade agreement before signing the diplomatic connection. Singapore, at that time, held the belief that establishing economic ties with the Soviet Union would have a significant impact on the equilibrium of Southeast Asian regional order in the Cold War era, not just in terms of trade but also in terms of security (M. Hong 2006).

At that time, Singapore was seeking to expand its trade opportunities by establishing trade and diplomatic relations with socialist countries. Additionally, it adopted a pragmatic approach to maintaining a balanced diplomacy in Southeast Asia amidst the Cold War. In fact, in 1968, the CIA documented how a Singaporean-flagged vessel delivered North Korean goods to Hai Phong, a major industrial port city in North Vietnam, to support the Vietnam War. Also on February 5, 1968, a group of economic officials from the warring North Vietnamese arrived in Singapore to investigate potential trade opportunities in Singapore. Ngo Thanh Giang, the secretary-general of the North Vietnam Chamber of Commerce, headed the five-member North Vietnamese trade mission, and the meeting was attended by officials from the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturers Association, as well as Bak Su Kwon, North Korea's deputy trade representative to Singapore, who was mentioned above.[42] Dozens of local Singaporean journalists were in attendance, demonstrating how important trade with the socialist bloc was to Singapore.

Singapore was also inclined to increase trade with socialist countries because only those with centrally planned economies could facilitate the specific conditions of trade that Singapore desired. Upon discovering that North Korea had been granted permission to establish a consulate in Singapore in 1969, the South Korean government expressed its concern and raised the issue with the Singaporean government. In response, the Singaporean government explained that trade agreements needed to be signed before any action could be taken.[43] In other words, as described above, Singapore would only authorise consulates in countries that had signed agreements that met its trade requirements. This perception of Singaporean politicians and bureaucrats is best illustrated by the transcript of a conversation between Singapore's finance minister, Goh Keng Swee, and South Korea's deputy foreign minister at the Chosun Hotel on April 10, 1970.

Deputy Foreign Minister: In 1967 and 1968, we negotiated twice for trade agreements, but were unsuccessful because we could not agree. The Singaporeans were trying to follow the pattern of the trade agreements they had with the communist countries, and we, as you know, have a free economy and a free trade policy, so we cannot follow the pattern of the agreements like the communist countries, which have government-controlled economic systems.

Goh: That's true. The countries that Singapore has trade agreements with are all communist countries, and we do not have any agreements with countries in the liberal camp, even though we do a lot more trade with them.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
National Archives of Korea,
MOFA 297-70, April 10, 1970)

Goh acknowledged that Singapore had been strengthening its trade agreements with countries in the socialist camp. This was to promote economic ties with socialist countries, which had plenty of room to improve, rather than with countries of the liberal camp, which already occupied higher positions in terms of trade volume (see Appendix 1). Another thing this meeting demonstrated was Singapore's strong interest in science and technology.

Goh: What is it like to promote science and technology in South Korea?

Deputy Foreign Minister: There are many engineering universities, especially the Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST), which was established with special assistance from then – U.S. President Johnson and is the only such institution in the East. It is equipped with all modern facilities, and top Korean scholars who used to teach in American universities are engaged in research there. We have a great weakness in the acquisition and development of science and technology, for it is only through this that we can keep up with the rapidly developing countries.

Goh: I wish I could get a copy of KIST's brochure. Singapore is also sending science and technology delegations to foreign countries, but so far, they have only been to the U.S., Germany, Japan, and France, which hasn't been of any practical use. When I return home, I plan to send the director of science and technology to [South] Korea to inspect Korean science and technology, including KIST. Also, when a Korean consulate is established in Singapore, a delegation of industrialists from Korea will come to Singapore, and Singapore will send the same delegation to Korea to learn and cooperate with each other.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
National Archives of Korea,
MOFA 297-70, April 10, 1970)

These discussions evoked Goh Keng Swee's concern with science and technology during the period he managed Singapore's manufacturing sector and overall economic strategy. In light of this situation, Goh, who maintained a neutral stance in foreign relations, promptly suggested the implementation of science and technology exchanges and manufacturer exchanges upon learning about South Korea's science and technology policy. This demonstrated the extent of the Singapore ruling elite's interest in science and technology-driven manufacturing during that period.[44] This matched their previous inclination to enhance relations with North Korea.

The conversation between Goh and the South Korean deputy foreign minister revealed that Singapore sought countries that could not only accommodate its desired trade structure but also engaged in the exchange and acquisition of the fundamental scientific and technological knowledge necessary for heavy and chemical manufacturing. Not only Goh Keng Swee, the architect of Singapore's economic framework, had this perception, but the entire bureaucratic elite in Singapore shared the same view. North Korea was an ideal match for Singapore's needs during the late 1960s. North Korea would have been a more suitable subject for a case study on pursuing a developmentalist state economy, as compared to the Soviet Union, which was already a developed nation. Singapore's emphasis on heavy and chemical manufacturing, as well as the associated science and technology, stemmed from the young country's commitment to achieving economic growth through manufacturing.

3.4.3 Singapore's Path to Industrial Development and North Korea as a Reference for a Developmental State

At the time of its independence in 1965, the three pillars supporting Singapore's economy can be summarised as: 1. intermediary trade that had continued since the colonial period; 2. a manufacturing base that had become increasingly important; and 3. the large-scale British naval base in Singapore.[45] Based on its geographical location and infrastructure as an intermediary trade port, Singapore maintained a stable position as a place where major resources in Southeast Asia and processed goods from around the world were gathered. There was no case in which Singapore's status as a trading hub was questioned. However, after acquiring autonomy in 1959 and the assumption of power by the People's Action Party led by Lee Kuan Yew, the most fundamental problem facing Singapore's economy was that intermediary trade and finance were not labour-intensive industries, and so did little to decrease the unemployment rate. In other words, many economic entities were proposing to increase the proportion of manufacturing-based industries to improve the quality of life by employing the country's growing population. Furthermore, in 1967, the British government decided to withdraw its naval base, which had produced huge amounts of expenses and employed tens of thousands of local residents. All these circumstances compelled the Singapore government to focus on the labour-intensive manufacturing industry (Huff 1994; 1999; Lim 2015).

In this context, the United Nations' industrial survey mission led by the Dutch economist Albert Winsemius had been closely observing Singapore's economy and submitted its findings in a special report in 1961, proposing an increase in Singapore's manufacturing share. A draft of the report had already been delivered to the Singapore government in December 1960, and was discussed in the National Assembly in 1961, leading to the First Economic Development Plan from 1961 to 1965 under the leadership of Goh Keng Swee,

the country's finance minister.[46] Upon this five-year plan, the development of the manufacturing industry began in earnest through the creation of a large-scale machinery and chemical industrial complex, also known as the Jurong Industrial Complex (the same complex later toured by Kang Ryang Wook, deputy prime minister of North Korea). As shown in Table 3.3, the share of Singapore's manufacturing industry steadily increased from 1960, surpassing trade and finance in 1973, reaching its highest share in 1980. Due to this characteristic of state-led industrial development in Singapore, Singapore's economic development has been classified as state capitalism with high government interventionism (Völgyi 2019).

Due to the implementation of the First Economic Development Plan, with a specific emphasis on manufacturing, Singapore experienced a remarkable annual GDP growth rate of 13 per cent between 1966 and 1969, the highest since the country's establishment. From the 1970s, exports of manufactured goods produced in Singapore's own manufacturing industry became more than the export of resources from Southeast Asia, which was the focus of the existing brokerage trade (Huff 1994). During the 1970s, the sectors that received the most significant investments in Singapore's manufacturing industry were machinery, electronics, and chemistry. These sectors gained considerable interest from both Singaporean government officials and local businessmen, as evidenced by their high level of attention at the North Korean trade exhibition in 1969 (Department of Statistics 1983).

A remarkable fact is that when looking at the trade volume by country during that period, the statistics on trade volume with North Korea were not even high enough to merit recording in Singapore's statistics (Department of Statistics 1983). Looking at Singapore's trade volume by region from 1964 to 1973, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe had the highest share, and among these regions, Malaysia, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom accounted for an overwhelming portion.[47] In the case of North Korea, the statistics did not even appear. In fact, the target amount of USD $34 million revealed in the news article on the agreement between Singapore and North Korea in 1967 was much lower than Singapore's trade with Sri Lanka at the same time (Department of Statistics 1983).[48] For 1968, it was also lower than the trade volume with South Korea (USD $42 million), which did not even establish an official trade agreement with Singapore. In the case of Japan, which had the highest trade volume with Singapore among countries in Northeast Asia, the volume had already reached USD $960 million by 1948 (Department of Statistics 1983).[49]

These statistics indicated that the trade volume between North Korea and Singapore was not a significant factor in their relationship. In the context of Singapore, it appeared that there was a greater inclination to draw inspiration from North Korea's remarkable industrial progress in East Asia, particularly in the machinery and chemical sectors that formed the basis of heavy industry in Northeast Asia. This preference was more pronounced than a direct focus

Table 3.3 Singapore GDP by Industry, 1960–1982

Year	*Agri and Fisheries*	*Quarrying*	*Manufacturing*	*Public*	*Construction*	*Trade*	*Transportation and Communication*	*Finance*	*Overall*
1960	75	6	249	49	72	719	292	247	2,149
1961	77	6	264	50	102	778	310	274	2,392
1962	84	8	297	56	114	818	321	311	2,513
1963	84	8	356	56	137	940	328	340	2,789
1964	82	10	384	66	159	777	312	369	2,714
1965	84	9	446	64	186	814	337	407	2,956
1966	101	11	521	78	187	961	359	445	3,330
1967	106	11	631	100	213	1,134	402	492	3,745
1968	121	14	769	117	256	1,286	475	578	4,315
1969	128	17	956	127	293	1,511	544	688	5,019
1970	134	19	1,186	149	397	1,639	629	815	5,804
1971	158	24	1,460	163	508	1,850	750	998	6,823
1972	160	28	1,853	185	692	2,067	924	1,232	8,155
1973	214	28	2,429	218	725	2,771	1,127	1,553	10,205
1974	229	33	3,084	231	929	3,588	1,338	1,882	12,543
1975	254	47	3,226	250	1,084	3,608	1,517	2,123	13,373
1976	256	56	3,611	273	1,205	3,815	1,795	2,233	14,575
1977	283	49	4,020	291	1,200	4,232	2,123	2,349	15,968
1978	273	38	4,620	351	1,122	4,631	2,616	2,581	17,750
1979	295	42	5,766	424	1,242	5,135	2,920	3,144	20,452
1980	320	81	6,919	557	1,560	5,730	3,436	4,128	24,200
1981	355	104	8,354	484	2,053	6,212	3,585	5,520	28,369
1982	348	138	8,204	520	2,879	6,621	4,116	6,770	31,348

Note: Unit: Million Singapore Dollars (SGD).

Source: Department of Statistics (1983).

on trade with North Korea. The relationship was not beneficial in terms of quantity, but it was beneficial in terms of quality.

The essence of this relationship was highlighted by Dr. Koh Keng Swee's statements on North Korean industrial achievements and his focus on science and technology, and Kang Ryang Wook's commentary on Singapore's Jurong Industrial Complex. The closeness of Singapore–North Korean relations from 1965 was a strategic decision by the Singapore government to drive economic growth through socialist trade and technology exchange, while North Korea sought to go beyond ideology and to leverage Singapore, a global trading hub, for disseminating its industrial performance. Undoubtedly, Singapore's emphasis on its ties with North Korea during its early years can be understood within this framework, despite the concerns expressed by the United Kingdom, the United States, South Korean, and Malaysian governments at that time. Singapore pursued a pragmatic approach that transcended the ideological divide of the Cold War.[50]

Based upon his experiences with Singapore's industrialisation during the 1960s and 1970s, Goh Keng Swee, the architecture of Singapore's industrial development, was invited by Deng Xiaoping, then president of the People's Republic of China (PRC), to serve as an economic advisor between 1985 and 1990 (Zheng and Wong 2012, 1). Furthermore, it clearly demonstrated Singapore's unique position among Asian developmental states, transcending conventional ideology. In the context of industrialisation, within the theory of the developmental state, Singapore is considered a multifaceted entity with a variety of ideologies (Cheang 2024; Som 2022; Cheang and Lim 2023). Singapore has consistently operated as a market-driven economy, but it also adopted a state-planned industrial strategy under an authoritarian political regime following the implementation of the development plan—led by Goh—in the 1960s, which might partially parallel with North Korea's state-led heavy and chemical industrial development despite the different meanings attached to industrialisation for the two countries, i.e., survival for Singapore, and propaganda for North Korea.[51]

3.5 Conclusion

Interestingly, economic cooperation between Singapore and North Korea peaked in 1969 with the establishment of a consulate, only to decline sharply after the mid-1970s. Newspaper articles in North Korea and Singapore were also more likely to focus on political and diplomatic relations between the two countries rather than economic cooperation, perhaps as a result of the Nixon Doctrine, which the Nixon administration announced in February 1970. The doctrine, which declared that regime competition in the Asia-Pacific region should be settled through economic aid to countries on the liberal side rather than through direct intervention, such as war or diplomatic pressure, led to the dominance of liberal states, such as the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and South Korea, over socialist states among Singapore's

trading partners (Department of Statistics 1983).[52] Furthermore, the North Korean socialist economic system controlling production and distribution and aimed at self-sufficient development failed to maximise its economic scale from the 1970s, which led to the "big cross" between the two Koreas from the late 1970s (Kim 2021). Even in the 1960s, the North Korean economy was on the decline, which necessitated the use of propaganda to shore up regime legitimacy.

The economic transformation and restructuring that occurred in the decade surrounding Singapore's establishment in 1965 is the fundamental basis for its current status as one of the most prosperous countries in Asia and globally. There is a substantial amount of research available on various accomplishments of Singapore, such as export-led industrialisation, the transformation of industrial structure towards manufacturing, and the enlargement of living space through local construction and the establishment of wide-area roads. Although these studies share a common theme that emphasises the crucial role of state-led planning in this transformation, as well as the significance of the United Nations' recommendations, they have largely overlooked the interaction with socialist countries, including North Korea, and Singapore's strong interest in establishing a heavy industrial base akin to that of North Korea. Nevertheless, newspaper archives and other sources from the National Archives of Singapore provide evidence that North Korea's development trajectory was used as a point of reference for the Singapore government in shaping the country's future, determining its developmental direction, and establishing its economic and industrial framework around 1965, when Singapore gained independence.

During the 1950s and 1960s, North Korea distinguished itself as one of the few Asian nations to independently cultivate its own dynamic industrial sector. Throughout that period, the primary objective of the Asian countries recently liberated from colonial and semi-colonial rule was modernisation, and the crucial factor for achieving modernisation was the realisation of national prosperity through industrialisation. Following the attainment of independence, the majority of nations prioritised industrialisation as a crucial aspect of their nation-building endeavours, while simultaneously striving to cultivate their own sense of nationalism. In numerous Asian countries, the concepts of nation-building, nationalism, modernisation, and industrialisation became closely intertwined. The geopolitical and geographical configuration of Asia during the Cold War differed from that of the West, which was primarily focused on competition with the Soviet Union. Within this framework, the connection between North Korea and Singapore can be interpreted as an instance where Singapore made a deliberate decision to move beyond ideology to ensure its survival and achieve industrialisation. The fundamental basis for the mutual advantage between the two nations was that North Korea utilised Singapore as a locus for disseminating its industrial accomplishments, while Singapore leveraged North Korea as a partner to enhance socialist trade and advance its industrial progress.

Notes

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51 Due to this characteristic of Singapore's economic planning, the country's system was often regarded as market socialism in the development theory of the 1980s (Gayle 1988).
52 See Appendix 1, which clearly shows the drastic increase in Singaporean trade volume led by the rise of liberal states.

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Appendix 1 Statistics on Singapore Trade by Selected Country, 1964–1982

Year	*Total*	*Malaysia*	*Japan*	*US*	*Hong Kong*	*Australia*	*UK*	*Taiwan*	*South Korea*	*China*	*Eastern Europe*	*USSR*
1964	6,250	2,136	459	309	270	238	532	50	14	197	148	84
1965	6,811	2,329	533	318	241	259	606	45	12	246	194	138
1966	7,439	2,361	587	372	233	259	592	48	18	408	170	120
1967	7,897	2,167	704	491	242	270	566	67	25	481	167	110
1968	8,974	2,072	966	677	286	305	641	102	42	541	213	139
1969	10,984	2,484	1,355	1,002	502	364	695	112	71	593	289	164
1970	12,289	2,443	1,819	1,342	550	500	893	164	74	454	301	174
1971	14,053	2,672	2,079	1,737	489	624	967	192	80	453	241	147
1972	15,687	2,785	2,266	2,288	616	680	975	296	75	456	221	125
1973	21,419	3,652	3,008	3,400	840	771	1,245	440	156	701	358	197
1974	34,559	5,033	5,264	4,958	1,372	1,258	1,570	519	288	769	466	262
1975	32,028	4,426	4,367	4,799	1,364	1,298	1,495	514	251	780	288	144
1976	38,670	5,685	5,259	5,354	1,803	1,409	1,447	703	389	754	431	208
1977	45,612	6,340	6,392	6,348	2,125	1,635	1,603	876	573	815	451	259
1978	52,586	6,987	7,894	7,456	2,361	1,526	1,841	1,081	734	906	563	311
1979	69,274	9,820	9,498	9,755	2,924	1,992	2,311	1,434	924	1,263	743	447
1980	92,797	13,333	12,500	12,509	4,251	2,833	2,840	1,918	1,206	1,990	904	558
1981	102,053	14,116	15,445	13,205	4,974	2,978	2,793	1,881	1,282	2,007	727	440
1982	104,717	15,924	15,634	13,368	5,002	3,172	2,613	1,885	1,422	2,397	853	640

Notes:

(1) Unit is million dollars.

(2) This table only includes major trading partners of Singapore while the total amount includes every trading dat

Source: Department of Statistics (1983).

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Part II

Trade and Identity

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4 Shaping the World-Class High-Tech Zone

A Case Study of the China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park

Jinghua Xing and George Hong Jiang

4.1 Introduction

With increasingly fierce global competition, scientific and technological innovation has become an important force to enhance national economic development. Since the 18th National Congress, the Chinese government has announced that innovation is the first driving force to lead development and has been implementing the innovation-driven development strategy (Naughton, 2021). In 2021, the 14th Five-Year Plan of China's National Development and Reform Commission proposed to support the construction of regional scientific and technological innovation centres in suitable places to accelerate the formation of a multi-level and systematic regional innovation pattern. Suzhou's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranks first among China's prefecture-level cities and is the second-largest city in the Yangtze River Delta in terms of GDP. The China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), in the eastern part of Suzhou, has proposed in its '14th Five-Year Plan and 2035 Vision' that it aims to 'further focus on building a world-class high-tech park and a world-class free trade zone'.

Historically, the SIP is one of the very first economic experiments in China. In the 1990s, when China was vigorously deepening its reform, and when China and Singapore established diplomatic relations in 1990, China urgently needed to introduce Singapore's advanced experience of industrial administration. In his 'South Tour Speeches', Deng Xiaoping proposed to 'learn from Singapore's experience', and sent many public officials to Singapore to study and discuss cooperation projects (Ho, 2015). At this time, Singapore, out of its own economic restructuring and optimisation of its political and geographic layout, had the demand for deeper economic cooperation with China, and the two countries' efforts to break the embargo clicked together (Wen et al., 2016). In 1994, the two governments formally signed the 'Agreement between the Governments of China and Singapore on Cooperation in the Development and Construction of Suzhou Industrial Park', which kicked off nearly 30 years of cross-border cooperation between China and Singapore.

Transforming from farmland to a centre of scientific and technological innovation, with only 3% of Suzhou's area, the GDP of the Suzhou Industrial

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Park was 333.03 billion RMB (about USD$48.3 billion) in 2021, thus generating about 15% of the city's GDP and total industrial output, 16% of the public budget revenue and 30% of the total import and export.[1] The development of the SIP has encountered trials and was questioned by many in the early days. However, looking back at its history and achievements, the China-Singapore Suzhou paradigm is undoubtedly a successful example of China's 'bring in'. A World Bank working paper praised the SIP as 'one of China's greatest Special Economic Zone success stories' and 'has inspired many countries/economies to emulate or learn from its successes' (Zeng, 2016, 2019; Chien et al., 2015). An innovation ecosystem is an important reference indicator to examine the sustainable development of a national or regional economy. The SIP has formed a 'multi-helix' regional innovation ecosystem through the synergy and complementary advantages of multiple innovation actors by absorbing tacit knowledge and experiences such as 'software transfer' from Singapore.

Concerning China's rapid economic growth, existing research focuses on how transformation from a planned economy to a market economy released socio-economic potentials (e.g., Naughton 1995; Coase and Wang, 2012), and how local governments' efforts to launch infrastructure construction facilitate economic growth (Montinola et al., 1995; Liu and Liu, 2023; Zhou, 2007). From the perspectives, our paper takes the development process of the innovation ecosystem of the SIP as a research object and analyses the transition of the local government. It presents a vivid example not only of regional economic transformation but also of the role of the government in launching local economic development. Furthermore, the paper aims to provide inspiration and ideas for the construction of a world-class high-tech park, as well as to serve as a reference for other developing countries and regions.

Section 4.2 presents the theoretical framework and methods that we use, including the Multiple Helix Theory and the innovation ecosystem theory. It also shows how such theories can be utilised for empirical investigation by proposing a framework. Section 4.3 presents the specific analysis through responding to the following questions: (1) What is the origin of the formation of the innovation dynamics of the park? (2) What are the similarities and differences in the various innovation paradigms and key innovation actors in the parks at different historical stages? (3) What new functions and roles have been assigned to these innovation actors? (4) What are the innovation experiences of the park that can be learned and replicated? Section 4.4 presents the conclusion.

4.2 Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

4.2.1 'Innovation System' and 'Innovation Ecosystem' from the Perspective of the Multiple Helix

Innovation has always accompanied the progress and evolution of human society and played an important role in the process of social development. In

recent years, the research on innovation has developed in a multidisciplinary manner, and the theory of innovation and its role in economic and social change have been widely studied with fruitful success. The innovation process is considered a 'black box' and is essentially a systemic phenomenon, which is generated by continuous interaction between different actors and organisations involved (Fagerberg and Mowery, 2006, 4).

The most important theories of innovation research include at least national innovation systems (Freeman, 1987; Lundvall, 1992), regional innovation systems (Cook, 1992), industrial cluster strategies (Porter, 1998), industrial innovation systems (Breschi and Malerba, 1997), the triple helix theory (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, 1995), and the innovation ecosystem theory (Shaker and Nambisan, 2011). An increasing number of experts and scholars consider the theoretical works as the research paradigms to examine national and regional innovation capabilities. In the past two decades, under the biological metaphor, a large body of academic literature in the humanities and social sciences, such as economics and management, has emerged surrounding the concept of the ecosystem, especially the innovation ecosystem (Catherine et al., 2021).

As knowledge production and technological innovation gradually evolve from simple innovation systems to more complex innovation ecosystems, the boundaries of innovation have transcended the original triple-helix framework of universities, industries, and governments. In the official report 'Open Innovation 2.0', the EU considers that the innovation paradigm is based on the quadruple helix of 'government (public institutions)—enterprises (industry)—university research—users (citizens)' from the perspective of innovation ecosystem (Curley and Salmelin, 2013). Government, firms, universities, and users interact in a cross-organisational innovation ecosystem to form a networking innovation. Carayannis and Campbell (2009), based on the 'triple helix' system, introduced the actor of 'civil society' and proposed a 'quadruple helix' innovation system based on university-industry-government-civil society. The quadruple helix refers directly to the 'media and culture-based public' and 'civil society' and is characterised by 'multiform, multilevel, multi-node, and multi-actor' synergy and interaction. The 'public' and 'civil society' are not only the consumers of knowledge but also the producers of knowledge. On this basis, Carayannis and Campbell (2011) further proposed the concept of the 'quintuple helix', which incorporates the natural environment into the knowledge innovation system and forms a quintuple helix innovation ecosystem of 'university-industry-government-public/civil society-natural environment'. This balances the relationship between growth and environmental requirements. The relevant interest groups of the 'quintuple helix' become broader, and more innovation actors join the complex innovation ecosystem, and the coordination and constraints of environmental resources reveal the symbiotic characteristics of innovation and ensure the sustainable development of knowledge in the innovation system.

In the innovation ecosystem, the industrial innovation ecosystem is a manifestation of innovation ecology at the industrial level, i.e., an open and complex system of symbiotic competition and dynamic evolution between various innovation actors in an industry and between innovation actors and the innovation environment through the flow of innovation elements. The innovation ecosystem is a decentralised, relatively stable, dynamic and complex system consisting of multiple components and the innovation environment that coordinates and co-evolves with each other. Its development and success rely on structural compatibility between diverse elements.

After Schumpeter's (1911) introduction of innovation into enterprises, Porter's (2011) national innovation system, and Cook's (1992) regional innovation system, industrial clusters have also entered the study of innovation networks and become a typical regional innovation system. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) proposed the concept of innovation clusters in the study 'Innovation Clusters: The Driving Force of National Innovation Systems', according to which an innovation cluster is an industrial cluster with 'innovation as the goal', and is composed of enterprises, research institutions, universities, venture capital institutions, and intermediary service organisations, etc. that form strategic alliances or various kinds of cooperation through industrial chains, value chains, and knowledge chains, and is characterised by an agglomeration economy and a large knowledge spillover. The multidimensional regional industrial clusters with geospatial linkage, cultural identity linkage, and knowledge linkage have formed an innovation 'habitat', just like an ecosystem, where different supportive systems and cooperative organisations relating to the main industries form an innovation ecosystem of interdependence and symbiotic evolution.

Research on regional innovation at home and abroad has produced fruitful results. However, the vast majority of researchers have taken the developed Western economies as their research objects, such as Silicon Valley and Boston. As the largest project jointly developed by the governments of China and Singapore, the SIP is undoubtedly well worth studying, in particular the key factors of its success and the evolutionary path of its innovative development. Many scholars attribute the success of SIP to a single entity, such as the government or the industry, ignoring the historical context of the park as a whole and the collaborative relationship between different innovation entities in the development process. Located in the Yangtze River Delta, which is the most economically active region in China, the SIP has become a model for industrial parks in China after nearly 30 years of development. The research on its evolutionary pathway fills the gaps in the study of regional innovation ecosystems and provides reference value for the practical problems of regional innovation development.

4.2.2 Research Methodology and Research Framework

This study adopts a case study approach, obtaining qualitative data about the industrial development of SIP by visiting relevant enterprises in the park

and conducting in-depth interviews with the heads of individual innovative enterprises. We also collected records and research results on the development of the SIP from government, companies, research institutions, and relevant domestic and foreign scholars (Liu, 2021; Pereira 2003; Han, 2008; Zeng, 2016, 2019; Xie et al., 2015). In addition, the materials include books jointly published by the Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) of Singapore's Ministry of National Development and the Suzhou Industrial Park Administrative Committee (SIPAC),[2] the 2019–2022 annual reports of the Sino-Singapore Group listed company (Sino-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park Development Group Co., Ltd.), the local history compiled by the Suzhou Municipal Government and the SIP, reports published by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), reports published by the Singapore newspaper *Lianhe Zaobao*, and the journalistic materials publicly released by SIPAC. This study also makes reference to reports on the establishment of SIP by domestic and foreign media and several special documentaries on the SIP.

Based on the above literature, the research framework is shown in Figure 4.1, which combines the regional innovation theory and takes the temporal and spatial changes of the SIP as the axes to analyse the evolution of the innovation ecosystem of the park from nothing to something, from an industrial zone to an emerging city, and from a single interaction to the multiple helix.

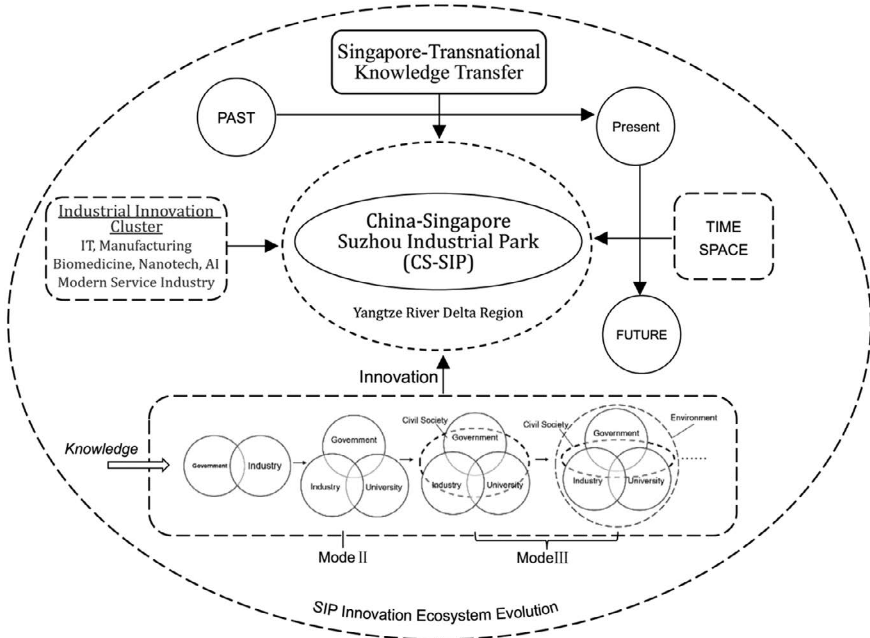

Figure 4.1 Theoretical Framework

4.3 The Evolutionary Path of the Multiple-Helix Innovation Ecosystem in the SIP

4.3.1 The Development Basis of the SIP and the Origin of Innovation

4.3.1.1 Institutional Innovation Driven by Government and Market-Oriented Operation in Parallel

As an important factor in institutional innovation, the government plays an important role in the process of market-oriented reform and development. The SIP is the first industrial park built by China in cooperation with foreign governments. As the largest developing country in the world, China has strong economic complementarity with Singapore, a 'global city-state' (Dent, 2001), both of which share the same language and culture, and belong to the same East Asian region geographically. The joint construction of the SIP has been strongly supported and promoted by the top leadership of both countries. This is a typical government-driven top-down governance system (Liu and Wang, 2021). Compared with the lessons of many developing countries that could not escape from the 'low level trap', the development scale of the SIP expanded rapidly with the 'troika' of state credit, overseas capital, and corporatisation of the government (Wen et al., 2016).

In the early 1990s, when China started to shift to a market economy system, it encountered the simultaneous outbreak of fiscal deficits, shortage of foreign currency, and financial deficits. China was in a predicament caused by Western sanctions and Singapore had to fund the construction of the park, which was a blessing for the Chinese economic environment at that time. The Chinese side ensured the successful operation of the project through state credit instead of capital credit. The Singaporean government enjoys high credibility internationally, and the Sino-Singaporean cooperation positioned the park as a high starting point from the very beginning, as Singapore's political and economic system has been described by a renowned Singaporean scholar, Wang Gungwu (1995), as 'capitalism mixed with socialist ideals'.

Since the reform and opening up, the Chinese central government has given local governments autonomy in terms of finance, foreign trade, and investment, making them relatively independent interest groups and allowing them to adopt a corporatised mode of operation. The government has given the SIP the preferential policy of 'not only special, but special among special', and investors from various countries can enjoy certain preferential policies in the park as those in the economic and technological development zones of coastal open cities (He, 2018). The SIPAC is responsible for the administration of the whole zone, and China and Singapore have established China-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park Development Company Limited (CSSD), which has the first-level development authority over the cooperative zone of the park, thus allowing the park to have a market-oriented development and operation mode. These empowerment and corporatized market-oriented operation models have injected vitality and momentum into the development of the park.

4.3.1.2 Transnational Learning of Knowledge Transfer and Doing-Business Concepts

The essence of collaborative innovation is cross-organisational transfer of knowledge and mutual learning. Between 1994 and 2000, the Singapore consortium owned 65% of the SIP and the Chinese consortium held the remaining 35% with a registered capital of $50 million. At the beginning of the cooperation, Lee Kuan Yew put forward the concept of 'software transfer', which transplanted the methods of Singaporean government's planning, public administration, and economic management to the SIP to achieve reciprocity and a win-win situation for both countries through Suzhou's regional innovation development. The 'software transfer' is actually the transfer of knowledge from Singapore's experience to China, and its practice in China. Knowledge transfer is seen as a faster and smarter way to learn from countries that have already experienced similar challenges or development trajectories, rather than self-learning through iterative experimentation, which is time-consuming and consumes valuable resources (Chien and Ho, 2011). Knowledge transfer in a controlled environment enables the dissemination of knowledge from the owner to the recipient, closing the knowledge gap between them (Tan et al., 2005).

In the early 1990s, Singapore already had rich experience in the development of industrial parks and successfully built the Jurong Industrial Park. Learning from Singapore's experience, the Sino-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park is mainly divided into three levels: (1) planning, development, and marketing of modern towns; (2) economic and social management of townships; and (3) clean government, legal system, and cultural-ethical civilization (Inkpen and Wang, 2006). In particular, Singapore's systematic and forward-looking concept of 'planning before construction, underground before above ground' and the advanced high-standard construction of 'nine passages and one levelling' plays a crucial role in the future development of the park, while the infrastructure does not generate profits in the early stages but incurred losses due to high construction costs.

> 'The previous planning of Suzhou Industrial Park cost RMB 30 million. This was unbelievable at the time. We made sure that the planning would not be outdated in 50 years,' Zhao Zhisong, chairman of Sino-Singapore Suzhou Industrial Park, once said in an interview.
>
> (Yang 2018)

> In order to achieve the flood protection capacity for a 100-year flood, the Singaporean shareholders proposed to fill the 70 square kilometres of the park area at 70 centimetres high. It would have cost $400 million per eight square kilometres to do so. …… But the park was built jointly by the two countries, especially to use Singapore's 'Software Transfer'. … Here is money from Singaporeans and Chinese, as well as from our Suzhou people. No one dares to delay.
>
> (He, 2018, 159–169)

Knowledge itself consists of explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). In knowledge transfer, the focus tends to be on explicit knowledge and not on tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the key determinant of regional innovation activities and constitutes the most important foundation for value-based creation (Pavitt, 2002). From 1994 to the present, thousands of Suzhou middle and senior officials and managers have been trained in Singapore. The Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB) established the Office of Park Learning from Singapore Experience to coordinate software transfer efforts in Singapore. This explicit knowledge has had a direct impact on the SIP's sustainable development and personnel nurturing. However, the transfer of tacit knowledge in Singapore has undergone a long and complex process. Tacit knowledge is formed based on specific national culture and organisational contexts, such as corporate culture, and is characterised by implicitness and contextual embeddedness (Benameur and Fredj, 2002). Tacit knowledge is often deeply rooted and highly dependent on a wide range of contextual factors, such as knowledge resources, organisational structure, culture, and values (Collinson, 1999). The Singapore government has specifically developed the Regional Plan in its Economic Strategic Plan to impart tacit knowledge relevant to doing business and managing industrial parks in Singapore (Haro Sly, 2021). In 1998, the SIP borrowed Singapore's concept of new community service and created a 'community centre' integrating commerce, culture, sports, health service, and education. In 2000, Singapore's 'one-stop' service model was applied to the SIP, creating the first 'one-stop' service in Suzhou. The first 'one-stop' service hall in Suzhou was established, followed by a one-stop service centre, which pioneered 'authorised approval' in China. Singapore's concept of 'supporting business and making business rich' has become the key knowledge for the SIP to learn from. Serving enterprises in all aspects, the SIP has greatly improved the investment environment by enhancing the transparency of policies and work efficiency.

In the initial stage, the SIP relied on foreign capital to achieve capital accumulation, and the leading industries were mainly outward-oriented processing manufacturing industries (Zhong, 2018). Relying on Singapore's international reputation and investment experience, many foreign-funded enterprises settled in the park one after another, forming the early industrial prototype. The positioning at the beginning stage was to choose the capital-intensive high-end manufacturing industry as the investment object. The leading foreign enterprises naturally became the first choice of the park, which not only had strong financial strength but also drove the clustering of upstream and downstream enterprises in the industrial chain, which laid a solid foundation for the park to increasingly shift from labour-intensive industries to technology-intensive industries with enhanced creativity and intellectual competitiveness.

The government's institutional innovation and Singapore's knowledge transfer drove the initial innovation capability of the park, while at that time the

endogenous research and development (R&D) power of the park basically relied on the introduction of foreign capital and R&D institutions of multinational companies. However, the foreign-funded processing manufacturing industry was overly dependent on the international market and could not get rid of the structural constraint problem. Coupled with the impact of the international financial crisis and the friction of the Sino-Singaporean cooperation, in 2001, the holding ratio between China and Singapore was adjusted, with the shareholding of the Singaporean consortium shrinking to 35% and the Chinese share increasing to 65% (Suzhou Gongye Yuanqu Difangzhi Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, 2012). And the Chinese shareholders took over the managerial function.

4.3.2 Analysis of the Triple-Helix Innovation Development Paradigm of the SIP

In the early years, Suzhou's manufacturing basis was established on the 'Sunan' model and attracted a large amount of foreign investment through a good doing-business environment. After China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, Suzhou experienced rapid Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) growth and gradually transformed from a 'world factory' into an advanced manufacturing and service industry. Suzhou gradually shifted from being the 'world's factory' to accommodating advanced manufacturing and service industries, and from focusing on upgrading industrial structure to shaping a modern industrial system. As a high-tech park built in cooperation between China and Singapore, the SIP has developed various innovation platforms, such as the Suzhou Biomedical Industrial Park (BioBAY), the Suzhou Nanopolis, the Creative Industrial Park, the Tengfei Innovation Park, the National University Science and Technology Park, and the Industrial Park for listed enterprises. The SIP innovation practice has changed from the traditional growth model—increase the total share of the regional economy, is driven by foreign investment, and takes manufacturing and processing industry as the leading industry—to continuously promoting technological innovation in the park to create a multiplier effect (Shi and Wang, 2019). The SIP has built a triple-helix model based on the tripartite collaboration of university-industry-government (UIG), forming a regional innovation system of knowledge sharing, mutual promotion, and harmonious development (see Figure 4.2). In the triple-helix model, three actors collaborate to achieve the optimum result: enterprises act as the main and leading innovation hub of technology; universities and research institutions are the innovation core of new knowledge; the government is the institutional chain of the innovation hubs. All three actors are independent and yet simultaneously intertwined in collaboration. Innovation activities are facilitated by a dual mechanism consisting of internal and external motors. This virtuous cycle results in a sort of enlarged value of innovation, i.e., '1+1+1>3' (Zhang and Huang, 2013).

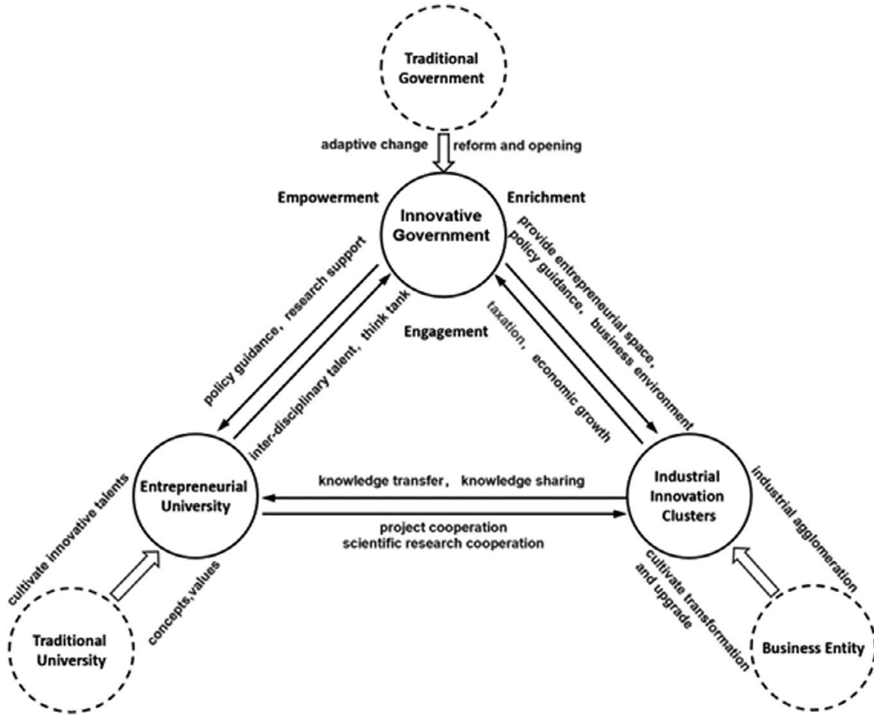

Figure 4.2 Triple-Helix Regional Innovation System

4.3.2.1 The Government in the University-Industry-Government (UIG) Triple-Helix Partnership

As the SIP started the construction of the Suzhou International Science and Technology Park (SISPARK)[3] in April 2000, and the development and construction of Dushu Lake Science and Education Innovation District (SEID)[4] in 2002, it vigorously introduced domestic and renowned foreign universities and began the exploration of building a regional innovation system (Cao and Li, 2018). The fundamental theories for developing and building high-tech parks come from the innovation ecosystem theory, national or regional innovation systems, ecosystem theory, and UIG triple-helix theory. These theoretical approaches emphasise the overlapping functions of university, industry, and government institutional domains in innovation; their interactions in promoting innovation; and the important role of the government in these aspects (Sun et al., 2019).

The government has played a crucial role in fostering China's economic growth in its initial stage (Xu, 2011; Montinola et al., 1995). The government has strongly adopted a 'top-down' path in the development of the SIP. The government planners are directly involved in the innovation process. In recent years, with the continuous improvement and maturity of the SIP,

governmental policies have incorporated a more 'bottom-up' approach. The government plays the role of a facilitator by promoting innovation through market mechanisms. In this 'top-down, top plus bottom' approach, the government plays a 3E role, namely, 'Empowerment', 'Enrichment', and 'Engagement', to promote knowledge exchange and interaction between different fields, thus improving the level of innovation in the region in an upward-helix fashion. Initially, the government of the SIP provided land and funding, and then introduced universities, research institutions, and high-tech companies. The governmental has gradually shifted to focus on knowledge-based social interactions. The UIG overlap each other and formed new organisations that enhance innovation, such as incubators, enhancers, university science and technology parks, venture capital firms, and public technology service platforms, etc. (Etzkowitz, 2008).

4.3.2.2 Universities and Research Institutes in the University-Industry-Government (UIG) Triple-Helix Partnership

In the era of the knowledge economy, universities are playing an increasingly important role in the economy and society. The trend in global higher-education institutions, of 'entrepreneurial universities', as exemplified by Stanford University and MIT, has broken the traditional role of universities only providing education. They encourage interaction among universities, enterprises, and governments, thus combining research, innovation, commercialisation of knowledge, and entrepreneurship. Universities and research institutions are the main source of innovation and the pillar of talent cultivation. Talent cultivation is the most critical strategic element for sustainable regional innovation.

The Stanford Research Park, founded by Stanford University in 1951, played a key role in the creation and formation of Silicon Valley, which in turn influenced the development of science parks around the world. China's highest governmental authorities attach great importance to the role of national research institutions and high-level research universities in enhancing the country's ability to generate scientific and technological innovation, and are keenly aware of the leading role that national university science and technology parks play in innovation for future industries.[5] Driven by knowledge innovation, the SIP has formed a triple-helix innovation ecosystem that transforms universities, industries, and governments into entrepreneurial universities, industrial innovation clusters, and innovative governments. The Suzhou Nanotechnology National University Science and Technology Park, located in SEID, relies on famous universities and national research institutes at home and abroad, and closely combines the scientific and educational intellectual resources of universities with the market's innovation resources. Through these channels, it introduces high-level talents, trains innovative talents, incubates scientific and technological entrepreneurship, transforms high-tech achievements, integrates innovation resources, promotes all-round enterprise services, and encourages cooperative development. It has become the core engine of scientific

and technological innovation in the park and an important hub for cultivation of high-end industries.

4.3.2.3 Industry/Enterprise in the University-Industry-Government (UIG) Triple-Helix Partnership

With Porter's (2000) pioneering research on industrial clusters, Chinese scholars in economics, management, economic geography, and other related disciplines have conducted a lot of research on the concept, characteristics, and policies of industrial clusters. Through the continuous evolution of industries, the SIP has formed a characteristic industrial system of '2+3+1', namely, two leading industries, three emerging industries, and one modern service industry.[6] The SIP also focuses on the three emerging industry clusters of biomedicines, nanotechnology application, and artificial intelligence. It continuously attracts various actors, promotes synergy, strengthens upstream and downstream linkage and collaboration in the industrial chain, and builds an industrial innovation ecosystem.[7]

To a large extent, industrial innovation relies on the collaboration of enterprises, universities or research institutions, the government, and intermediary service institutions in regional innovation clusters. The ability of industrial innovation helps to promote the prosperity of enterprises in the cluster because of common industrial problems that cannot be overcome by individual enterprises due to insufficient resources, and because of the problem of technology diffusion due to high transaction costs of research results (Xie et al., 2014). The triple helix is the dynamical mechanism of Knowledge Production Model II. It is a process of joint learning and practice by multiple actors. Knowledge of complex production technologies is seldom acquired through being fully digested, and 'learning by doing' is necessary to understand such knowledge (Fagerberg and Mowery, 2006). In the triple helix (UIG), enterprises are the main body of technological innovation. In the process of learning by doing, learning by using, and learning by interacting, enterprises conduct innovative practices with knowledge elements. From being associated with each other only through competitive relationships in the market, enterprises have changed to alliances with other companies and collaborative relationships with universities and government (Nonaka and Hirotaka, 1995). The key to solving the problem of tacit knowledge transfer is that enterprises, universities, and research institutes 'learn by doing' together in cooperation, and new 'collective knowledge' is formed in the 'collective action' of cooperation. In the Suzhou Biobay, more than 80% of the companies are composed of returnee students, and they need to undergo the 'trial-and-error' learning process to apply new knowledge in different situations. Huawei, whose basic philosophy of human resource development is 'doing by learning, learning by doing', has been cooperating with universities and research institutes in the SIP since 2012, when it set up the Huawei Santian Island Base in the park. It continuously applies technology, such as

cloud computing, to local communities and promotes the overall development of the digital industry in Suzhou.

4.3.3 Synergistic Innovation of Multiple Helix in the Innovation Ecosystem of the Park

Facing the complex development of human society, the triple-helix innovation paradigm is not sufficient to reveal the various social problems that are occurring and changing. When knowledge innovation gradually moves from the triple-helix innovation to the innovation jungle, it also indicates that innovation has entered into the higher-order 'quadruple helix'. In Knowledge Production Model III, the 'public' and 'civil society', influenced by culture and values and shaped by the media, no longer just act as recipients or consumers of knowledge, but also profoundly influence and participate in the process of knowledge innovation. Innovation depends on a good ecological environment, which is an important guarantee for sustainable innovation. The 'quintuple helix' emphasises the socio-ecological perspective of the 'natural environment', focusing on the interaction, co-development, and co-evolution of society and nature (Carayannis and Campbell, 2010).

In 2015, the SIP became China's first comprehensive pilot zone for open innovation, and in 2019, it was approved by the central government to build a pilot free trade zone. The superposition of the three zones of 'Economic Development Zone + High-Tech Zone + Free Trade Zone' and the multiple-helix innovation synergy of 'university-industry/enterprise-government-public/civil society-natural environment' has given an innovative and ecological identity to its urban and social function. With the trend of diversity in social development, more and more innovation actors are developing and forming, and through mutual learning and open sharing, the rapid flow of innovation resources forms a sustainable innovation community.

4.3.3.1 Innovation of Public/Civil Society Elements in Multiple-Helix Partnership

The knowledge society and the process of democratisation of innovation have made users and the public the actors of innovation, and the traditional boundaries of laboratories and innovation activities have 'melted' (Song and Zhang, 2009). The innovation ecosystem introduces a human-centred user/public appeal, re-examining and re-evaluating the value and risks of science itself. In the real-life context of the integration of innovation elements, 'mass entrepreneurship and innovation' is changing the way people participate in innovation and is profoundly changing the relationship between 'university-industry/enterprise-government'. The concept of 'user innovation' was first introduced by Von Hippel (1988) as a source of innovation, and Malerba (2007) argues that consumer capabilities and user innovation are a driving force for industrial development. The perspective of user co-creation is a further step that allows

users to participate in the whole process of corporate innovation, forming a new mode of interaction between users and companies.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology are the main application sites of user co-creation, and more companies invite users to participate in the innovation process to improve the functions of their products. The SIP has taken the lead in laying out the AI industry in the country and has built a national pilot zone for the innovation and development of a new generation of AI. The park has launched AI+X (manufacturing, medical, finance, logistics, cultural and tourism) fields and solicited proposals from the society,[8] in which companies improve product performance and increase user reliance through AI user experience and back-end algorithms. Huawei (Suzhou) Artificial Intelligence Innovation Centre carries out Huawei Cloud Enterprise Intelligence (EI), face recognition, voice recognition, and other multi-scene user experiences, and user co-creation activities to provide product improvement paths and meet user needs through back-end computing. In addition, Huawei cooperates with mainstream social media platforms such as Weibo and TikTok to gain all-round insights into customer demand with its leading data intelligence technology, and to create a personalised, intelligent, and diverse experience cloud ecology in collaboration with customers from the perspective of transcending industry boundaries and existing markets (Zhang et al., 2022). As a representative enterprise of 'user co-creation', Xiaomi, Bilibili, and Nio have proven the value of human-centred user co-creation. The park currently provides 114 low-cost, convenient, and open mass innovation spaces for small and micro-enterprises and individuals to start their own business.[9] The active participation of innovative users and regional citizens has resulted in a highly open and inclusive ecosystem with a regional innovation culture. On the other hand, some products contain risks, and users appeal to the media by asking companies to improve product safety and risk management capabilities in product development.

Civil society includes not only users but also civic organisations formed spontaneously by citizens. The organisational power, innovational capacity, and administrative ability to integrate resources that these organisations possess can often play a prominent role. The SIP has established a variety of alliances, associations, and business groups that function in different fields, and these organisations have formed an effective and mutually complementary ecosystem with the government, enterprises, and universities. For example, the Artificial Intelligence Industry Association of the SIP provides an open, cross-industry, cross-field communication platform for enterprises, universities, and research institutes. It also organises members to explore local R&D projects jointly and facilitates face-to-face exchanges between experts from universities, research institutes, and business partners, thus ensuring the smooth and healthy development of the industries. Furthermore, such acts can provide intellectual support for the local government's decision-making, such as promoting local innovation, optimising entrepreneurial tax, and preparing joint research reports and digital industry development plans with government departments.

Many social organisations connect government, enterprises, and universities and research institutions altogether.

The users/public form the 'public system' in the social innovation ecosystem and use information and social capital to drive innovation and sustainable development. The government is both the guide and facilitator of the innovation process, as well as the coordinator and supervisor. Universities and research institutions are not only the source of knowledge for innovation but also serve as the voice of civil society for fairness and justice from a scientific perspective and provide advice to the government. Based on respecting public opinion, the public and the university-industry/enterprise-government link up as an eco-innovation community of multiple interest groups.

4.3.3.2 Innovation of Natural Environment in Multiple-Helix Partnership

Facing ecological and environmental problems such as the deteriorating living environment and the increasing depletion of natural resources, the original human social knowledge innovation system needs systematic improvement. Whether the purpose of innovation is to maximise economic benefits or to re-examine the relationship between the natural environment on which human beings depend and the value of innovation, and to take into account the sustainability of innovation, this is a kind of advanced thinking to face the ecological problems directly. The 'quintuple helix' outlines the importance of sustainable development for 'eco-innovation' and 'eco-entrepreneurship' (Carayannis and Campbell, 2010). The 'quintuple helix' includes the 'natural environment' as one of the actors of innovation, which is a key element in the knowledge and innovation model, and its relevance becomes broader and more complex.

In 2012, China's top leadership included the construction of ecological civilisation as a major national strategy for the first time. Under the top-layer design, concrete action plans are being formed from the central to local levels, from the government to enterprises and from universities to the private sector. As one of the first national eco-industrial model parks in China, the SIP has been designed according to the city's identity from the very beginning, so that the planning of industrial areas, commercial areas, living areas, and parks has been designed carefully in the early stage. And the strict 'one vote veto' approval system and the environmental management system have been established. In particular, a recycling 'symbiosis' (Curien and Lorrain 2012) was established among the wastewater treatment plant, the sludge drying plant, and the cogeneration plant in the south of the park. After years of exploration, the park has formed a green industry chain model in which the government is responsible for the supervision of water supply and drainage, and several water companies are responsible for the operation and management.

In recent years, low-carbon technology embodying resource-saving and eco-friendly concepts has been rapidly developed globally, and promoting green growth has become an important mission of the innovation ecosystem

(Li et al., 2014). As a pioneering area for green and low-carbon development, the SIP has comprehensively promoted the implementation of the dual-carbon (i.e., carbon peak and carbon neutral) goal. Governmental departments, enterprises, and professionals have jointly studied the path to achieve the dual carbon goal and promoted the integrative development and collaborative innovation of the park ecology.

The government has introduced a number of legal regulations and policies surrounding the new ecological requirements and has actively worked with universities and research institutions to form a committee of Carbon Generalised System of Preferences; develop rules and processes for emissions reduction trading; and define the rights, responsibilities, and obligations of participating actors. The government also funds universities and enterprises to jointly develop projects related to energy conservation, emissions reduction, and development of renewable energy. In addition, it promotes public participation, vigorously cultivates ecological awareness, and establishes a sustainable market transaction system, thus attracting social capital to participate in building a market-oriented operation mode.

The university education system, represented by the Dushu Lake Science and Education Innovation District in the SIP, has received more research funding on relevant topics and has exported intellectual and human capital to society and enterprises through research and development of new knowledge and talent cultivation. The universities and incubators in the park have jointly initiated alliances and cooperative projects to build applications for dual-carbon technology innovation. Research institutes on ecological and environmental management have been set up by the University of Liverpool and Suzhou University, closely collaborating with the local government and enterprises to facilitate sustainable ecological development in the region by means of scientific research methods. The Jiangsu Academy of Environmental Sciences has also set up a research group on the 'Eco-Island' in the SIP, which has developed conservation methods and technical standards by investigating and analysing the current status of local biodiversity conservation and main problems.

Many energy technology enterprises in the SIP develop low-carbon economy by applying digitalisation, intelligence, and capitalisation, and provide users with green transformation and upgrading solutions. Green technology has promoted the high-quality development of enterprises. Some enterprises have optimised their industrial structure, sought energy alternatives and improved their original industrial chains. They take up their corporate social responsibility while achieving growth in business performance. Bosch and other companies in the park have already taken the lead in the innovative practice of 'zero carbon factory'.

The public is paying more attention to the living environment. Green lifestyle and environmental awareness are increasing. The concept of 'green water and green mountain is the mountain of gold and silver' has been deeply rooted in the park, and domestic and international high-end talents are flowing to a

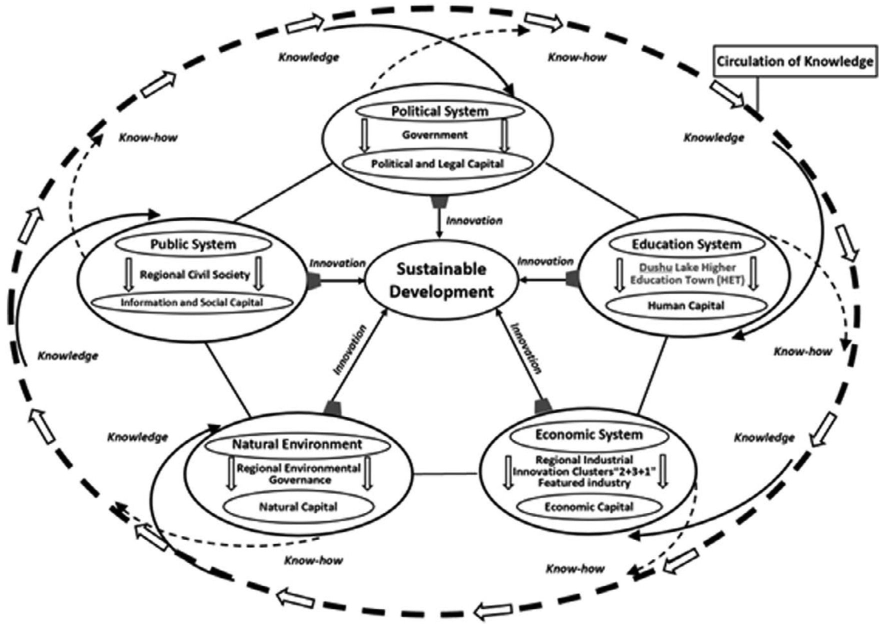

Figure 4.3 The Innovation Ecosystem in the SIP

more liveable field. While practising low-carbon green life, the public also plays a supervisory role in the ecological environment management of the park.

Ecological economics regards nature as natural capital, and natural capital is considered an 'asset that generates economic value' and participates in 'ecosystem services' as a key element. The goal of the quintuple helix structure should be to maintain a balance with nature, explore regenerative technology, and use limited resources in a sustainable manner (Carayannis et al., 2012).

Combining with the innovation practice of the park, the multiple helix of 'university-industry/enterprise-government-public-natural environment' form an innovation ecosystem (see Figure 4.3) under the approach of promoting green production and life, where the five innovation actors interact and have their own special properties. The flow of knowledge from one actor to another means that new knowledge and skills are created, and knowledge is circulated in mutual flow to promote upgrading innovation.

4.4 Conclusion

Focusing on the micro-regional innovation, the research of the SIP reflects the institutional arrangement and evolutional path of local regional innovation after China launched the 'Reform and Opening Up' Policy. The park is a special product under the synthesis of various elements in special time and space. The SIP is an unprecedented experiment under bilateral cooperation between

the Chinese and Singapore government, both of which are willing to share resources, including technology, information, and capital. It establishes a model of transnational cooperation and China's policy of 'go global' and 'bring in'.

In the SIP, the incubators, science and technology parks, technology transfer offices, venture capital institutions, the industry associations and other intermediary service agencies, and derivative agencies complement, interact, and cooperate with the innovation actors in the 'university-industry/enterprise-government-public-natural environment' structure. All this promotes regional innovation capabilities and consensus for sustainable development among actors.

The development of the park is not only path-dependent but also path-setting and groundbreaking. 'The SIP Experience' has become one of the 'three magic weapons' of Suzhou's reform and opening up, which also provides important enlightenment and reference value for regional innovation and development in China and other emerging countries. Under the new knowledge innovation model and the multiple-helix model, the SIP is leading the construction of Chinese-style modern industrial parks. An open, innovative, and world-class high-tech park is emerging.

Through the study of the innovation ecosystem in the SIP, the following views are summarised:

- The dynamic mechanism of the SIP is formed by institutional innovation and transnational knowledge transfer, driven by the government.
- The innovation model of the SIP has gone from a single-actor innovation model to the 'university-industry/enterprise-government-public-natural environment' multiple-helix model.
- In the practice of collaborative innovation, the government departments in the park have shifted from a traditional government to an innovative government in terms of governance; the industrial form in the park has been upgraded from traditional industries to modern industrial structures, and from industrial agglomeration to innovative resource agglomeration and industrial innovation clusters; and entrepreneurial universities and scientific research institutions carry out knowledge diffusion and practical transformation of academic results through technology transfer.

In brief, mainly relying on qualitative methods and graphical abstraction, the chapter contributes to current discussions about innovation ecosystems and the role of the government in facilitating regional economic growth, by showing how the SIP develops to a multiple-helix innovation ecosystem and how the local government achieves administrative transformation.

Admittedly, while the research has left some questions unanswered, due to the lack of specific empirical data, such as employment creation, the number of patents and sales, and the amount of startups, we believe that our future investigation will be further improved by including the analysis of additional official data in the present paper.

Notes

1 For statistical details, see: https://www.sipac.gov.cn/szgyyq/yqjj/common_tt.shtml.
2 For example, see: https://www.clc.gov.sg/docs/default-source/books/book-visionary-partnership-suzhou.pdf.
3 Located on Jinji Lake Avenue in the Suzhou Industrial Park, between the Jinji Lake and the Dushu Lake, the Suzhou International Science and Technology Park is an important carrier of scientific and technological innovation in Suzhou and the Suzhou Industrial Park, covering a planned area of 77 hectares, with a total construction area of over 1.5 million square meters and a total investment of nearly 7 billion RMB. It was launched in April 2000. The Suzhou International Science and Technology Park is a Chinese Science and Technology Business Incubator, a National Software Industry Base, a National Animation Industry Base, a National Innovation and Entrepreneurship Base for Overseas High-Level Talents, a Pilot Base for China's European and American Software Export Project, a Suzhou Entrepreneurship Centre for Chinese Overseas Students, a Chinese Service Outsourcing Demonstration Base, and a Suzhou Cloud Computing Industry Base.
4 The Dushu Lake Science and Education Innovation District is located in the core area of the SIP, and has introduced 33 famous Chinese and foreign institutions such as University of Science and Technology of China, University of Liverpool, the Institute of Advanced Studies at Oxford University, National University of Singapore, Renmin University of China and 15 'national-team' research institutes such as the Suzhou Nano Institute of Chinese Academy of Sciences, as well as new R&D institutions such as Huawei Suzhou R&D Centre, Microsoft Suzhou R&D Centre, and Siemens China Research Institute.
5 See: https://www.most.gov.cn/xxgk/xinxifenlei/fdzdgknr/fgzc/gfxwj/gfxwj2022/202211/t20221109_183360.html.
6 They refer to the two pillar industries (new generation information technology and equipment manufacturing), the three emerging industries (biomedicine, nanotechnology application, and artificial intelligence), and the high-end modern service industry.
7 For an official report, see: http://tradeinservices.mofcom.gov.cn/article/szmy/gnqwfb/202201/125929.html.
8 For an official report, see: http://www.sipac.gov.cn/szgyyq/jsdt/202209/013aca0564814908b2464cff03a8bf98.shtml.
9 For an official report, see: http://www.sipac.gov.cn/szgyyq/yqmtjj/202208/50e2a2b1437046279af85ed0fcab9258.shtml.

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5 Hedging Perspectives for Small States and Regimes

A Comparative Study between Singapore and Hong Kong

Kian Cheng Lee and Haiping Gao

5.1 Introduction

This chapter argues that far-sighted hedging strategies employed by small states and regimes play a crucial role in managing security challenges and achieving global influence. Specifically, we examine the comparative effectiveness of Singapore over Hong Kong in the utilisation of holistic hedging strategies to secure the position of Asia's top financial hub. The 32nd iteration of the Global Financial Centers Index (GFCI 32) released on September 22, 2022, shows that Singapore has supplanted Hong Kong as the region's leading financial hub (Wardle & Mainelli, 2022, p. 32). Our analysis, therefore, draws upon the concept of hedging to elucidate the significance of hedging initiatives in securing distinctions in the global arena. By delimitation, while Singapore and Hong Kong differ in terms of sovereignty, this paper conceptualises them as political economic entities with similar constraints, challenges and convictions to achieve financial superiority.

The concept of hedging has been widely discussed in the literature on small states' security strategies (Kuik, 2008, 2021; Lai & Kuik, 2021). According to Murphy (2017), hedging is a strategy employed by small states to manage their security challenges by diversifying their external relations and building alliances with various regional and global powers. Hedging strategies can be classified as passive or active, where passive hedging refers to a state's reliance on a single external power, and active hedging refers to a state's diversification of its external relations with multiple powers (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017). By working definition, this chapter refers to hedging as strategies of a small state or regime to deal with security challenges—in relation to maintaining financial exceptionality given its inherent limitations—through political, economic (industrial), societal and diplomatic lenses.

Singapore's hedging strategy is characterised by her active and purposive approach to diversifying its external dependence. The country's economic pragmatism and political partnership have played a crucial role in its hedging strategy (Kuik, 2008). Singapore's efforts to attract foreign investment and develop its technology industry have helped it to become a hub for innovation and trade in Asia. Its national identity and selfhood policies, which promote

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multiculturalism and social harmony, have helped to foster a stable domestic environment that is attractive to foreign investors (Chang, 1997). In contrast, Hong Kong's hedging strategy has been more passive, relying heavily on its close relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC). The regime's collaboration policies, which aim to maintain a balance between its colonial past and Chinese identity, have limited its ability to diversify its external relations (Dayley, 2018). Hong Kong's recent political crisis and increasing tension with PRC have highlighted the limitations of its hedging strategy (Pan & Korolev, 2021).

The significance of this research lies in its analysis of the importance of hedging strategies for small states and regimes in a conflicted and volatile world. As noted by Kuik (2008), the rise of PRC and the increasing uncertainties in the global political climate have made hedging strategies more important than ever for small states. Singapore and Hong Kong's strategic location, stable political environments, advanced infrastructure, and highly developed financial services industries have allowed them to shine out as the financial centres in Asia (Qiao, 1996). Notwithstanding the hurdles, Singapore has developed significant ties with the PRC (Fook, 2018) while also functioning as a partner of the United States of America (U.S.A.) in both economic and security initiatives, as well as an advocate for a strong U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific region (Kuok, 2016). Hong Kong, despite being a Special Administrative Region of PRC, must maintain a healthy relationship with the United States to consolidate its vital role in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States has also recognised its vital role by emphasising the importance of securing a unique connection with Hong Kong (Gill & Tang, 2007). The success of Singapore (Ciorciari, 2019) and Hong Kong can be linked to their hedging techniques as a tiny country or region, which can be very instructive for small and medium-sized countries or regions, especially those in the Asia-Pacific regions that are currently processing the Sino-American split. Hence, by studying Singapore's superiority over Hong Kong in implementing key hedging strategies, this chapter provides valuable insights into the significance of developing effective hedging strategies in overcoming geo-economic challenges and achieving global influence.

In terms of design, this chapter is premised on providing quantitative data descriptions with a qualitative analysis approach. The authors conceptualise the four independent variables as political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagements, to compare and analyse how Singapore leverages hedging strategies in outperforming Hong Kong.

In terms of contribution, this research seeks to fill the existing lacuna of hedging perspectives for small states and regimes from the comparative Asian approach. This chapter sheds light on the effectiveness of different hedging strategies, offering preliminary policy considerations for small states and regimes in developing and implementing them.

In the next section, a critical review is provided to surface the research gap in extant literature. Thereafter, the research design is presented with a

conceptual framework to synthesise the conceptualisation and the operationalisation of the four independent variables. Next, the data of the comparative cases will be analysed and presented. Subsequently, the research findings and discussion of their implications will be presented. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a recap of the key argument and contributions of the research.

5.2 Literature Review

While there are numerous studies examining hedging strategies in specific industries or fields such as finance, agriculture, sports games, healthcare and information technology, a comprehensive examination of the holistic hedging strategies of Hong Kong and Singapore is noticeably absent from the existing literature. These two countries possess unique political, economic, societal and diplomatic factors that significantly influence their approach to hedging. Moreover, the literature review reveals a crucial gap in the understanding of intrinsic core issues that impact the optimal execution of hedging strategies. Existing studies predominantly focus on external factors in foreign policy adjustments and neglect the comprehensive analysis of internal dimensions. Therefore, there is a pressing research gap calling for a more nuanced approach to study the hedging strategies of Hong Kong and Singapore. This approach should consider both the internal and external dimensions of these strategies, encompassing the distinct political, economic, societal and diplomatic aspects of each country. By filling this gap and adopting a multi-dimensional platform, this research aims to shed light on the comprehensive and interconnected factors that shape the hedging initiatives of the two nations.

Hedging strategy, originally used by Dutch merchants to hedge their risks in the tulip bulb market in the 17th century, has been continually applied in the financial market to counteract potential stakes. However, it has also been meticulously studied by the scholars in the domains of finance and business regarding corporate governance and capital markets (Briggs, 2006; Lel, 2012; Kahan and Rock, 2017), agriculture and natural resource management (Li, Huang, Yang, Qiu, Zhao, & Cai, 2021; Hoehl & Hess, 2022), sports games (Na, Su, & Kunkel, 2019), environmental and energy management (Saeed, Bouri, & Tran, 2020), education (Loi & Lim, 2019), healthcare and information technology (Kojima, 2019). While these literatures cover interesting and crucial themes, they fail to offer a holistic approach. Hence, our chapter seeks to provide a broader lens through examining internal and external dimensions from political, industrial, social and diplomatic considerations.

A second corpus of literature related to hedging strategies takes on a geopolitical approach. Constituting as the majority, this group of studies delves into issues related to national security (Kim, 2023), political strategies (Jones & Jenne, 2022) and international relations (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019). Various intellectuals, despite their different nations and ideological ideas, have written about hegemony and power, between the East and West (Mendiolaza, 2019; Oba, 2019; Noorafkan & Tishehyar, 2022; Wilkins, 2023). Notably,

since 2022, many of these journal articles have been focussing on the rising tensions between the United States (U.S.) and PRC (Swaspitchayaskun & Surakitbovorn, 2023; Kao, 2022; Vu, Soong, & Nguyen, 2022). On a positive note, this set of literature has accentuated the saliency of hedging strategies for Southeast Asian countries due to the ramifications of Sino-American escalating rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region. However, none has examined the implications for Singapore and Hong Kong in specific. Besides, as these scholarly works place greater emphasis on external factors in foreign policy adjustments, there is a neglect in the examination of domestic or internal conditions that affect the optimal execution of respective hedging strategies. This can be seen in the gap of extant literature on intrinsic core issues related to the variegated political, economic, societal and diplomatic aspects—potentially precipitating the fluctuating relations between the PRC and United States—have not been thoroughly examined. An exception is Murphy (2017), who situates hedging strategies against the political, economic, societal and diplomatic landscapes. Nonetheless, while Murphy (2017) approaches the thematic approach across these dimensions from a Southeast Asian regional perspective, it has not embarked on a specific comparison between Singapore and Hong Kong where startling similarities between these localities warrant an examination of their hedging strategies in the aforementioned dimensions. Hence, our chapter seeks to provide a more nuanced approach by situating the study between Singapore and Hong Kong on a multi-dimensional platform.

Additionally, a sizeable number of Singapore-centric scholarly studies have delved deeply into the hedging measures adopted in Singapore from a thematic approach: politically (Kuik, 2008), economically (Chang, 2022), socially (Vidra, 2012) and diplomatically (Kuik, 2010). In the similar vein, another corpus of studies has explored hedging measures in Hong Kong from the perspectives of overall percentage of academic research on currency (Chang & Wong, 2003), corporate governance (Briggs, 2006) and foreign exchange (Chong, Chang & Tan, 2014). While these studies seek to explicate the hedging strategies from specific national contexts, they have unwittingly been myopically fixated on specific themes without observing the overlapping dimensions that lie therein. Rather than being merely confined to a single nation or territory, we argue that a comparative approach might elucidate the significance of key constituent factors under the lens of similarities and differences.

Finally, there are a handful of studies that attempt to provide comparisons between Singapore and Hong Kong. These studies are heavily focused on innovation (Wang, 2018), education (Seng, Keung, & Kay Cheng, 2008), business (Lee & Ducruet, 2009) and pandemic prevention (De Deyn, Ng, Loke, & Yeoc, 2020). While these studies adopt a comparative approach, they are not examining hedging strategies that are of interest in our research. Besides, these issue-based research do not comprehensively consider the multiplicity of political, economic, societal and diplomatic factors. Hence, our chapter aims

to fill the lacuna by adopting a comparative intra-Asian approach to the study of holistic hedging strategies between Hong Kong and Singapore.

5.3 Research Design and Methodology

According to the Global Financial Centres Index published in September 2022, Singapore has surpassed Hong Kong to take the lead in the region and third place globally due to its stronger business environment, ease of doing business, more FDI and expanding private banking sector (Wardle & Mainelli, 2022). Our topic of interest is the effectiveness of hedging strategies of small states and regimes through the comparative case studies between Singapore and Hong Kong. The research question is: "What are the factors that enable Singapore to surpass Hong Kong as the top financial hub of Asia?" For the purposes of this study, we will be exploring the four independent variables: (1) political hybridisation, (2) industrial diversification, (3) social integration and (4) diplomatic engagements, as shown in Figure 5.1.

Political hybridisation, as discussed in this article, refers to the combination of different political systems or regimes, resulting in a "hybrid" form of governance that incorporates elements of both authoritarianism and democracy. Unlike the concept of a hybrid regime, which primarily focuses on the form of a regime, political hybridisation involves the blending of diverse political systems to create a unique governance model. It is a form of "democracy with adjectives" where democratic values and practices are selectively adopted and adapted by authoritarian regimes to enhance their

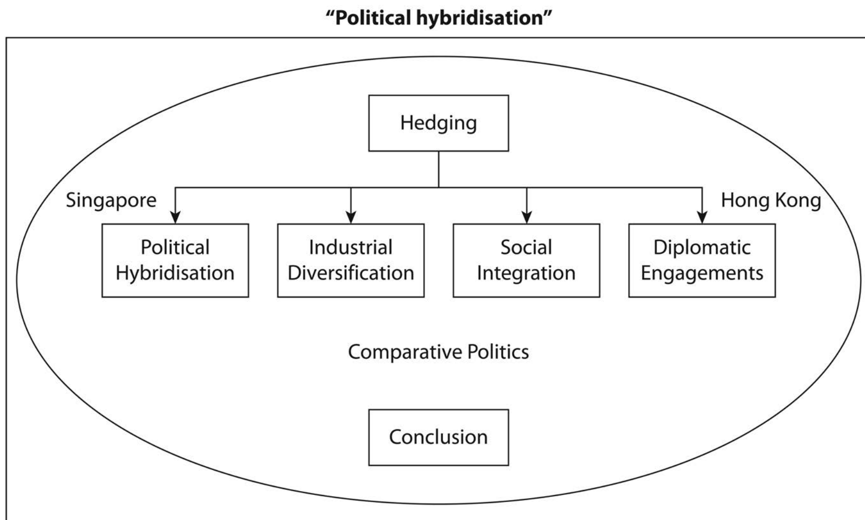

Figure 5.1 Conceptual Framework.

Source: Author's own compilation.

legitimacy and survival (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011). In this process, there can be an oscillation between authoritarian and democratic practices, and semi-authoritarian regimes that combine limited political competition with authoritarian control (Ottaway, 2013). Finally, it can also be a transitional stage towards more consolidated democracies, allowing societies to gradually adapt to democratic norms and practices while mitigating political instability and conflict (Sorensen, 2018).

One study by Heilmann (2008) analysed the relationship between political hybridisation and economic growth in China. The authors found that a combination of centralised decision-making and market-oriented reforms, which they referred to as "political hybridisation", allowed for more efficient policy-making and contributed to China's economic success. In addition, there is a large body of literature on the relationship between political stability and economic growth. For example, Alesina and Perotti (1996) found that political instability can have a negative impact on economic growth, while Acemoglu et al. (2001) argued that political stability is a necessary condition for sustained economic growth. Taken together, these studies provide evidence that a political system that is a hybrid of democracy and authoritarianism can contribute to efficient policy-making and promote economic growth.

Political hybridisation is influenced by various subfactors that shape the dynamics of political systems. Political violence, civil liberties, rules of law, government effectiveness and economic stability all contribute to the degree of hybridisation in a political context. For example, high levels of political violence and limited civil liberties can indicate a less hybridised political system, whereas strong rules of law and effective governance can foster a higher degree of hybridisation. The quantitative indexes, such as the World Bank's Doing Business Index, Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Index and IMD World Digital Competitiveness Rankings, provide objective measurements to assess the performance of these subfactors and offer insights into the extent of political hybridisation. By examining these subfactors and their indexes, researchers can understand the relationship between political hybridisation and hedging strategies, as well as the associated risks and stability in the political domain.

Next, industrial diversification refers to the expansion of range and variety of economic sectors and activities within a country or region (Xiao, Boschma, & Andersson, 2018). This concept can be achieved through various strategies, such as expanding domestic markets, promoting export-oriented industries, attracting foreign investment and adopting technology and innovation (Zhu & Pickles, 2014). It can also involve the development of new sectors, such as service, creative and digital industries, which can create new sources of growth and employment (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2005). Though industrial diversification has been critiqued as increasing the complexity and volatility of the economy (Goldin & Vogel, 2010), it has also been lauded as contributing to peace

and prosperity of small states and regimes (Stevens, Lahn, & Kooroshy, 2015). As Singapore and Hong Kong are vulnerable to external economic shocks and disruptions in global supply chains (Anbumozhi, Kimura, & Thangavelu, 2020), industrial diversification can help them increase their domestic market, support export-oriented sectors, draw in foreign investment and embrace cutting-edge technology (Zhu & Pickles, 2014).

Industrial diversification is influenced by several subfactors that drive economic development and the expansion of industries. Market demand is a critical subfactor, as it reflects the needs and preferences of consumers and businesses, driving the direction of diversification. Technological innovation plays a crucial role by enabling new industries and transforming existing ones. Access to resources, such as skilled labour and infrastructure, determines the feasibility and competitiveness of different industries. Government policies, including regulations and incentives, shape the environment for industrial diversification. Quantitative indexes like the Global Financial Centres Index, Global Innovation Index, Logistics Performance Index and World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index provide measurements for evaluating the performance of these subfactors. By examining these subfactors and their indexes, researchers can gain insights into how industrial diversification relates to hedging strategies, as well as the potential risks and opportunities in different economic sectors.

Third, social integration refers to the social cohesion and harmony by incorporating diverse groups and individuals into a common culture and identity (Lobo, 2011). It is an essential factor for the stability and prosperity of a society as it promotes trust, solidarity and cooperation among its members and helps to prevent social and political conflicts (Fukuyama, 1996). Social integration can be achieved through various policies and practices, such as education, employment, housing, healthcare and social services (Nash, Wong, & Trlin, 2006). It can also be influenced by economic development, political governance and cultural values (Cruz-Saco et al., 2008).

Social integration relies on specific subfactors that contribute to inclusivity and cohesion within societies. Cultural diversity and acceptance foster a sense of belonging and understanding among diverse social groups. Social policies and programs aimed at promoting equality, education and welfare play a crucial role in creating a cohesive society. Access to technology and communication ensures that individuals and communities are connected and engaged. Inclusive public spaces provide platforms for interaction and social integration. Quantitative indexes such as the Diversity Index, Social Welfare Index, Digital Access Index and Public Space Index offer measurements to evaluate these subfactors. By analysing these subfactors and their indexes, researchers can explore the relationship between social integration and hedging strategies, as well as the potential social risks or benefits associated with them.

Finally, diplomatic engagements, the fourth independent variable, refer to the interactions and exchanges between states or international organisations

through which they seek to achieve common goals, resolve conflicts and establish mutual understanding and cooperation (Fierke, 2005). Diplomatic engagements can take various forms, including bilateral and multilateral negotiations, treaty-making, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance. Diplomatic engagements are essential to international relations and foreign policy, as they provide a forum for states and international organisations to address global challenges and promote their interests and value (Constantinou & Opondo, 2016). Diplomatic engagements can also hedge against external threats and uncertainties by building relationships and networks that can provide support and protection in times of crisis or conflict (Lim & Cooper, 2015).

Diplomatic engagements encompass various subfactors that shape international relations and global challenges. National interests guide the priorities and strategies of nations in their diplomatic engagements. Geo-politics, including the balance of power and regional dynamics, influence the diplomatic landscape. Ideology plays a role in shaping alliances, partnerships and conflicts among nations. Globalisation affects the interdependence and interconnectedness of countries, impacting their diplomatic engagements. International organisations provide platforms for diplomatic cooperation and coordination. Global issues such as climate change require diplomatic efforts to address shared challenges. Quantitative indexes such as the Global Competitiveness Index, Global Peace Index, Democracy Index, Globalisation Index, Global Diplomacy Index and the Climate Change Performance Index offer measurements for evaluating these subfactors. By examining these subfactors and their indexes, researchers can understand how diplomatic engagements relate to hedging strategies in response to global challenges, political strategies and regional dynamics.

In essence, the four hypotheses based on the four independent variables are: (1) A more coherent form of political hybridisation leads to better stability and prosperity, (2) an increase in industrial diversification leads to greater economic opportunities and resilience, (3) a stronger vertical and horizontal integration in the society leads to better security and mobility and (4) a wider platform of diplomatic engagements in the international community leads to an increase in foreign investments.

To illustrate, Table 5.1 succinctly summarises how the four independent variables are measured in terms of their respective sub-factors and corresponding indexes.

In Table 5.1, we have also indicated the measurements of the quantitative data as indexes—worldwide rankings or scores provided by the international authoritative organisations—that will be compared to clearly illustrate the differences between Singapore and Hong Kong.

However, for operationalisation, we are not merely relying on the quantitative data. To discern the complete hedging perspectives, we will be employing sentiment analysis or opinion mining as our qualitative research approach. This is a pivotal natural language processing (NLP) technique discerning sentiments expressed in texts. Liu (2012) notes that sentiment analysis involves

Table 5.1 Identification of Sub-factors and Indexes of the Four Independent Variables

Access to technology and communication	Digital Access Index (Kreutzer, 2009)
Inclusive public spaces	Public Space Index (Mehta, 2014)
Diplomatic Engagements	
Sub-factors	*Quantitative Data*
National interests	Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) (Porter et al., 2008)
Geopolitics	Global Peace Index (GPI) (Schippa, 2011)
Ideology	Democracy Index (Norris, 1999)
Globalization	Globalization Index (Hedlund, Fick, Carlsen, & Benzie, 2018)
International organizations	Global Diplomacy Index (Hanegraaff, Beyers, & De Bruyckcr, 2016)
Global issues	Climate Change Performance Index (O'Brien & Leichenko, 2000)

Source: Author's own compilation.

the extracting of subjective information, such as opinions and emotions, and the classification of this information as positive, negative and neutral sentiments, accordingly. The data sources for sentiment analysis can diversely range from social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, to customer reviews on commercial sites, like Amazon. Based on text reprocessing, feature extraction and sentiment classification, the focus in this process is to automatically assign sentiment labels to the texts. Pang and Lee (2008) underline the significance of sentiment analysis by highlighting its ability to provide actionable insights from unstructured textual data.

Sentiment analysis is a pivotal component of our research design. It assists us in gauging the emotional tone and content of statements made by political leaders in both regions and its impact on the four key dimensions. This provides the basis for comparison of sentiments expressed in statements related to Singapore and Hong Kong within the context of the four dimensions. First, in political hybridisation, we can elucidate how leaders' emotions reflect the dynamics of political hybridisation in both regions by evaluating sentiments expressed in relation to political cooperation and hybrid systems. Next, in industrial diversification, sentiment analysis helps us to understand the enthusiasm or concerns surrounding this aspect. It reveals the emotional nuances that influence the strategies and attitudes toward growth through industrial diversification. Third, in social integration, examining emotional tones within discussions related to social cohesion and unity allows us to assess how sentiments impact the broader concept of social integration within these regions. Finally, in diplomatic engagement, analysing sentiments in diplomatic exchanges helps us understand how emotions influence international relations, treaties and agreements, contributing to diplomatic engagement.

There are several methodological steps we employ in sentiment analysis. In the first step, data collection involves the gathering of a comprehensive data set of statements, speeches or documents from political leaders, government officials or relevant sources in Singapore and Hong Kong. This is done by using keywords to generate the most relevant speeches related to the four independent variables of this study. Next, text reprocessing refers to the preparation of the text data through the removal of stop words, punctuation and special characters while performing stemming and lemmatization to reduce words to their base form. Subsequently, NLP libraries or other sentiment analysis tools, such as TextBlob, are used to analyse sentiments by classifying them according to the positive, negative or neutral categories. Thereafter, sentiment scores are assigned to each sentence and the range of the scores reflects the intensity or polarity of the sentence's sentiments. These scores can be captured as either between –1 (negative) and 1 (positive) or a scale of 0 to 1. This is followed by categorisation of sentences according to the four related independent variables. Then, the process transits into data visualisation where visual representations are created to display the distribution of sentiments in each category. This provides a clear overview of the emotionality in different dimensions. Data compilation takes the process further through the collection of statements and documents that specifically address the four dimensions: political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagement. Finally, a comparative analysis is undertaken where the sentiment scores and emotional nuances between Singapore and Hong Kong for each dimension are examined.

In summary, our research buffers quantitative data analysis by choosing the qualitative approach of sentiment analysis to unpack the sentiments embedded in texts associated with the hedging discourses found in Singapore and Hong Kong. These refer to salient comments that have been made by international political leaders in Singapore and Hong Kong regarding the four independent variables. Specifically, this multi-faceted approach seeks to unravel the emotionally nuanced hedging perspectives underlying the four independent variables of political hybridisation, industrialisation, social integration and diplomatic engagements.

5.4 Case Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the comparative data for both Singapore and Hong Kong according to the four independent variables. The presentation will include both quantitative and qualitative analyses based on the sub-categorical indexes and the key authoritative comments, accordingly.

5.4.1 Political Hybridisation

In terms of political stability, civil liberties, and government effectiveness, Singapore generally outperforms Hong Kong. According to Table 5.2, Singapore

Table 5.2 Quantitative Data Analysis for Indexes Regarding Political Hybridisation

Category	*Indexes (Ranking)*	*Singapore*	*Hong Kong*
Political violence	Global Peace Index: Singapore: 9th (2022) Hong Kong SAR: China 89th (2022) (IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022)	Singapore is generally considered to have a low level of political violence	A significant amount of political violence involving protests and clashes with police
Civil liberties	Freedom House Index: Singapore: 47th, rated "partly free" (2022) Hong Kong: 43rd, rated "partly free" (2022)	Its restrictions on civil liberties, particularly with regards to freedom of speech and the press	The erosion of civil liberties
Rules of law	World Justice Project Rule of Law Index: Singapore: 17th (2022) Hong Kong: 22nd(2022)	A strong rule of law	The erosion of the rule of law in recent years
Government effectiveness	Worldwide Governance Indicators: Singapore: Score 2.29 (2021) Hong Kong: Score 1.53 (2021) Note: the higher score, the more effective (Worldwide Governance Indicators)	A high level of government effectiveness with a well-developed bureaucracy and a reputation for low levels of corruption	The concerns about erosion of government effectiveness in recent years
Economic stability	World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index: Singapore: 1st (2019) Hong Kong: 3rd (2019)	Its strong economy and stability	The concerns about the long-term stability of the economy

Source: Author's own compilation.

is ranked 9th in the Global Peace Index, indicating a low level of political violence, while Hong Kong is ranked 89th, indicating a significantly higher level of political violence. Both countries are rated "partly free" in the Freedom House Index, with Singapore ranked slightly lower than Hong Kong. Singapore is ranked 17th in the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, while Hong Kong is ranked 22nd, with both countries generally considered to have strong rule of law. Singapore has a higher governance effectiveness score than Hong Kong, indicating a higher level of government effectiveness. Both countries are known for their strong economies and stability, with Singapore ranking slightly higher than Hong Kong in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index. However, recent political unrest in Hong Kong has raised some concerns about the long-term stability of its economy. In other

words, from a political hybridisation perspective, we can surmise that Hong Kong's recent political turmoil has revealed a somewhat disruptive political transitioning as the PRC government plays an increasing interventional role. On the other hand, Singapore's sustained political hybridisation over the years has continued to generate positive outcomes. Hence, while both countries have strong economies and stability, Singapore appears to have a slight edge over Hong Kong, as it has a more coherent form of political hybridisation expressed in political stability, civil liberties and government effectiveness.

Based on the composite sentiment scores in the aspect of political hybridisation, Singapore scores 0.1833, suggesting a generally positive sentiment. Hong Kong, on the other hand, scores 0.067, which indicates a less positive sentiment regarding political hybridisation. The Singapore government has maintained a stable political climate over the years due to its emphasis on strong leadership and a centralised governing system. As shown in Table 5.3, the country's

Table 5.3 Political Leaders' Comments on Singapore and Hong Kong's Political Hybridization (Qualitative Data)

Singapore	*Hong Kong*
"We believe in a democratic society by governments freely and periodically elected by the people... We believe, in the virtue of hard work and that those who work harder in society should be given greater rewards... We believe that the world does not owe us a living and that we have to earn our keep." (S Rajaratnam, 1965) "To make up for this, we need the highest quality leadership that we can muster. Our size makes us more vulnerable, but also gives us a nimbleness that other countries cannot match. However, this demands responsive, forward-looking leadership, and not blind flying on autopilot." ("Remaking the Singapore Economy" at Keynote Address by Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the Annual Dinner of the Economics Society of Singapore 8 April 2003, from https://www.mas.gov.sg/news/speeches/2003/remaking-the-singapore-economy-keynote-address-by-dpm-lee-hsien-loong-at-the-annual-dinner-of-the-economics-societyof-singapore--8-april-2003) "My view is that people's preferences matter, but I don't define the people's preferences as merely the views of existing majorities. 'The people', as I see it, includes future generations, and governments have a special responsibility to resist popular pressure for tax breaks and welfare measures that undermine the prospects of future generations. So perhaps we should define democracy as a government chosen by the people, including contemporary and future generations." (Lee Kuan Yew, 1999)	"I don't want to spend your time, or waste your time, for you to ask me what went wrong, and why it went wrong. But for a Chief Executive to have caused this huge havoc to Hong Kong is unforgivable. It's just unforgivable. If I have a choice, the first thing is to quit, having made a deep apology, is to step down. So I make a plea to you for your forgiveness." (Carrie Lam, 2019) "Nothing is more important than the rule of law in Hong Kong." (Carrie Lam, 2019) "The decision to implement the law was designed for steady implementation of 'one country, two systems' and Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability." (Li Keqiang, 2020)

Source: Author's own compilation.

leaders have consistently focused on promoting economic growth and development, which has helped to maintain a sense of political stability. In contrast, Hong Kong has experienced significant political turmoil in recent years due to its political hybridisation. Since 1997, the territory has been operating under a "one country, two systems" framework, which has unwittingly dichotomised the political systems and caused unintended ideological schisms. Consequently, it lacks coherent planning in transition, which denies the smooth process of political hybridisation. This has inadvertently caused tension between the Chinese central government and pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the Chinese government's increasing involvement in Hong Kong's affairs has perniciously led to widespread protests and civil unrest, which has gravely affected the territory's political stability. Furthermore, the appointment of Hong Kong's chief executive by the Chinese government has caused the deterioration of political trust as the "clipping of wings" is an apparent sign of the territory's limited autonomy. In contrast, the election of Singapore's leaders through a centralised system has allowed the country to maintain a sense of stability and control over its political climate. Overall, while both Singapore and Hong Kong operate under political hybridisation, the level of political stability in each territory differs significantly. Singapore's emphasis on strong leadership and economic development has helped to maintain political stability, while Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" framework has led to political unrest and disruptions to its stability.

5.4.2 Industrial Diversification

As attested by the indexes in Table 5.4, Singapore, a major hub for international trade and investment, has a highly developed and diversified economy, which produces electronics, petrochemicals and biomedical products. The Singapore government has invested heavily in R&D with a growing focus on technology and innovation in areas such as artificial intelligence, digital health and sustainability. It implements policies to support the growth of new industries and encourages diversification, offering tax incentives, grants for R&D and industry clusters in focussed areas such as advanced manufacturing, biomedical sciences and digital services. In contrast, Hong Kong heavily focuses on the services sector, with a well-developed logistics and transportation sector. It has a highly skilled workforce and business-friendly regulatory environment where there are initiatives and government support for innovation and entrepreneurship. However, the latter is limited by its small and densely populated city and is heavily reliant on importing goods and services.

Singapore scores 0.333 on sentiment analysis in this dimension, showing a positive sentiment toward industrial diversification. Despite a somewhat positive score of 0.175, Hong Kong performs relatively worse than Singapore. Hong Kong's economy is heavily reliant on the financial services sector, which accounts for a large portion of its GDP. While this sector has been successful in driving economic growth in the past, it also leaves Hong Kong vulnerable to global economic shocks that could impact the financial industry. On the

Table 5.4 Qualitative Data Analysis for Indexes Regarding Industrial Diversification

Category	*Indexes (Ranking)*	*Singapore*	*Hong Kong*
Market demand	Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI) Singapore: 3; Hong Kong: 4 (2022) (Dutta, Lanvin, Rivera León, & Wunsch-Vincent, 2022) WTO's Global Enabling Trade Report Singapore: 1; Hong Kong: 3 (2016) The World Economic Forum (weforum.org) WEF's Global Competitiveness Report Singapore: 5; Hong Kong: 7 (2021) (World Competitiveness Rankings—IMD)	International trade and investment, produces electronics, petrochemicals and biomedical products	Heavily focusing on the services and financial sectors
Technological innovation	Global Innovation Index (GII) Singapore: 7; Hong Kong: 14 (2022) (https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo-pub-2000-2022-section1-en-gii-2022-at-a-glance-global-innovation-index-2022-15th-edition.pdf: What is the future of innovation-driven growth? (wipo.int)) Bloomberg Innovation Index Singapore: 2; Hong Kong: 38 (2021) (Reddit, 2022) World Digital Ranking Singapore: 4; Hong Kong: 9 (2022) (IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022)	Highly innovative, invests heavily in R&D	Growing focus on innovation and entrepreneurship
Access to resources	Human Development Index (HD1) Singapore: 12; Hong Kong: 4 (2021–2022) (UNDP, 2022) Logistics Performance Index (LPI) Singapore: 7; Hong Kong: 12 (2018) Global Rankings 2018 (Logistics Performance Index, 2019) World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index Singapore: 2; Hong Kong: 3 (2019) (World Bank, n.d.) Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) Singapore: 2; Hong Kong: /China 36 (2022) (Lanvin & Monteiro, 2022)	Limited natural resources, heavily reliant on importing goods and services	Limited natural resources, heavily reliant on importing goods and services

(*Continued*)

Table 5.4 (Continued)

Category	*Indexes (Ranking)*	*Singapore*	*Hong Kong*
Government policies	World Bank's Doing Business Index Singapore: 2; Hong Kong 3 (2019) (Rankings, 2019) Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Index Singapore: 1; Hong Kong: /China 148 (2022) (The Heritage Foundation, 2023) IMD World Digital Competitiveness Rankings Singapore: 4; Hong Kong: 9 (2022) (IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022) World Economic Forum's Global Information Technology Report Singapore: 1; Hong Kong: 14 (2015) (World Economic Forum, 2015)	Focussed on areas such as advanced manufacturing, biomedical sciences and digital services	Focussed on logistics, creative industries and financial services
Economic conditions	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate Singapore: 3.6%; Hong Kong -3.5% (World Economic Outlook (October 2022) - Real GDP growth (imf.org) Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) Singapore: 51.2 (Jan 2023); Hong Kong 51.2 (Jan 2023) (PMI, Purchasing Managers' Index—Manufacturing, Services (spglobal.com)) World Economic Outlook (WEO) Singapore: 2.3% (2023); Hong Kong 3.9% (2023) (World Economic Outlook (imf.org)) Global Risk Report Singapore: 5th (2021); Hong Kong: 18th (2021) (Global Risks Report 2023 | World Economic Forum World Economie Forum (weforum.org))	Highly stable and well- managed economy	Highly developed and open economy

Source: Author's own compilation.

other hand, Singapore has been successful in diversifying its economy and expanding into a range of industries beyond just finance. This has helped Singapore to weather economic downturns better than Hong Kong and maintain a more stable economic base. Singapore has a robust manufacturing sector as well as a growing technology and innovation sector, both of which contribute significantly to its GDP. So, as reflected in Table 5.5, while both Singapore and Hong Kong have strong financial services industries, Singapore's ability to

Table 5.5 Political Leaders' Comments on Singapore and Hong Kong's Industrial Diversification (Qualitative Data)

Singapore	*Hong Kong*
"Minister Mentor Lee's views and insights on Asian dynamics and economic management were respected by many around the world, and no small number of this and past generations of world leaders have sought his advice on governance and development." (https://joslinv.wordpress.com/2015/03/26/how-lee-kuan-yew-influenced-worlds-leaders/)	"We support Hong Kong's efforts to diversify its industries, which will help the city maintain its competitiveness in the global market." "We are clear that the support for Hong Kong in enhancing its status as an international financial, transportation, trade centre and aviation hub, as well as in strengthening its roles as a global offshore Renminbi business hub, an international asset management centre and a risk management centre." (https://www.scmp.com/topics/carrie-lam-policy-address-2021)
In Asia, China continues to prosper, which is both a major opportunity and a huge competitive challenge. Firstly, we must promote innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Secondly, we must deregulate and liberalise the economy, to allow enterprise to flourish. And thirdly, we must encourage self-reliance complemented by community support, and minimise dependence on the state." (Lee Hsien Loong, 2003)	"Hong Kong reaped the benefits from both the East and the West. As the center of economic gravity in the world shifts eastward, the mainland along with fast-growing economies throughout the region will be a major engine of global growth, and an abundant source of economic opportunities. Hong Kong always bounces back, better than ever... We have full confidence in its tenacity and its future. We are already seeing (an) encouraging rebound." (https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/global-financial-leaders-return-to-hong-kong-after-pandemicpolitical-changes/2727628)
"In our overall development strategy, we put more emphasis on the services sector as a major growth engine, alongside manufacturing that had long been a key driver. In manufacturing, we made a conscious effort to assimilate and adopt new technology from the advanced economics, moving up the value chain as our incomes and capabilities rose." (Lee Hsien Loong, 2003)	"In 2020, our financial services contributed US$76 billion. That's 23.4 per cent of our GDP. Hong Kong has been the world's number-one IPO venue for seven of the last 13 years. Hong Kong is also one of the world's leading biotech fundraising hubs." (John Lee, 2022)

Source: Author's own compilation.

diversify and expand into other sectors has given it an advantage in terms of overall economic performance and stability.

5.4.3 Social Integration

In Table 5.6, Singapore and Hong Kong show some similarities and differences in terms of social integration. Both places have diverse populations, but while Singapore has policies and programmes to promote multiculturalism and respect for different cultures, Hong Kong has been facing issues related to discrimination against some groups such as ethnic minorities and refugees. In addition, both Singapore and Hong Kong have strong social safety nets in the areas of healthcare, education and housing. However, there are concerns about the adequacy and accessibility of services in Hong Kong, particularly for marginalised groups. Singapore is known for having a stable political environment with high levels of safety and security, but Hong Kong has experienced significant political and social unrest in recent years, which has undermined stability and security. Moreover, while both economies are highly developed, Hong Kong faces sharper income inequality and less housing affordability, which can create divisions within society. Finally, while both cases attain high connectivity and advanced technology, the Hong Kong population has greater resistance towards government surveillance and restrictions on freedom of expression. In terms of inclusive public spaces, both locales have designated lots that are meant to be inclusive and accessible to all members of society; nonetheless, in the case of Hong Kong, there remains a heightened sense of wariness pertaining to the draconian restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression.

According to sentiment analysis, Singapore scores 0.1233, which reflects a moderately positive sentiment toward social integration. Over at Hong Kong, the score of 0.05 suggests a lower positivity as compared with Singapore. Taking a closer look, the quotes in Table 5.7 suggest that Singapore and Hong Kong have different approaches to social integration. In Singapore, there is a strong emphasis on building a collective national identity, which involves instilling a sense of loyalty to the country through education and a shared understanding of the country's history and challenges. This is seen as crucial to ensuring the success of the country's economic and social policies. In contrast, Hong Kong's recent protests and unrest suggest that there is a lack of social integration and a growing divide between the government and the people. Some people feel disconnected from the society they live in, which has led to protests and unrest. The focus in Hong Kong has been on maintaining freedoms and democratic values, which are seen as central to the city's identity, rather than on building a collective national identity.

5.4.4 Diplomatic Engagements

Based on Table 5.8, Singapore and Hong Kong are two Asian city-states with significant geopolitical importance and strong economic ties to the rest of the world. Singapore has historically focussed on developing a strong economy, attracting

Table 5.6 Quantitative Data Analysis for Indexes Regarding Social Integration

Factor	*Indexes*	*Singapore*	*Hong Kong*
Cultural diversity and acceptance	Diversity Index Singapore: 0.68 (2019) Hong Kong: 0.78 (2019) (Views of diversity by country | Pew Research Center)	Highly diverse society with policies and programs to promote multiculturalism and respect for different cultures	Diverse city, but concerns about discrimination against some groups such as ethnic minorities and refugees
Social policies and programs	Social Welfare Index Singapore: 0.95 (2019); Hong Kong 0.88 (2019) (OECD Social and Welfare Statistics | OECD iLibrary (oecd- ilibrary.org))	Strong social safety net, provides healthcare, education and affordable housing, with programs to promote social cohesion and integration	Strong social safety net, provides healthcare, education and public housing, but concerns about adequacy and accessibility of services, particularly for marginalised groups
Political stability and security	Political Stability and Absence of Violence/ Terrorism Index Singapore: 1.94 (2021); Hong Kong: 1.50 (2021) (Glossary | DataBank (worldbank.org))	A stable political environment, low levels of political unrest and high levels of safety and security	Experienced significant political and social unrest in recent years, which has undermined stability and security
Economic prosperity	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita Singapore: GDP per capita of US$65,233 (2021); Hong Kong: GDP per capita of US$49,629 (2021) (GDP per capita, by country 2021 | Statista)	Highly developed economy with a strong focus on innovation, technology and education to support long-term economic growth	Highly developed economy with concerns about income inequality and the affordability of housing, which can create divisions within society
Access to technology and communication	Digital Access Index Singapore: 0.84 (2020) Hong Kong: 0.89 (2020) (International Telecommunication Union, 2020)	One of the most technologically advanced countries in the world, with high levels of internet and mobile phone penetration	Highly connected city with concerns about government surveillance and restrictions on freedom of expression
Inclusive public spaces	Public Space Index Singapore: 0.93 (2018) Hong Kong: 0.79 (2018) (Morgan & Evans, 2022)	Has public spaces that are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all members of society, such as parks and community centres	Has public spaces that are designed to be inclusive and accessible to all members of society, but concerns about restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression in public spaces

Source: Author's own compilation.

Table 5.7 Political Leaders' Comments on Singapore and Hong Kong's Social Integration (Qualitative Data)

Singapore	*Hong Kong*
"This was a new generation but now that they are all grown up, probably fathers and grandfathers but at that time, this concept (of a nation) was not even part of the imagination of adults, let alone children. So, the best way to create a nation is to start from the schools. Once this is embodied and thinking by pure repetition every day, that becomes part of the psyche of the people. So let me tell you if you are a Singaporean—two and a half million—no place to run—no more. Whether you are a Singapore Chinese, Singapore Malay and Singapore Indian, you cannot run away. This is your last stand, last outpost. So how do you do it? If you think of yourself as Chinese, Malays, Indians and Sri Lankans, then Singapore will collapse. You must think of Singapore—this is my country. I fight and die for Singapore if necessary." (https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Sinnathamby_Rajaratnam)	"A small minority of people do not mind destroying Hong Kong's economy. They have no stake in the society which so many people have helped to build and that's why they resort to all this violence and obstruction, causing huge damage to the economy and to the daily life of the people." (Carrie Lam, 2019)
"In Singapore, our previous remaking succeeded because we mounted a strong collective response—at independence a determination to beat the odds and survive, in 1985 a sense that if we made sacrifices together, we could make our economy competitive again. Without that sense of group interest, we could not have cut employer CPF rates, nor restored our competitiveness in a way that few other countries could do." (Lee Hsien Loong, 2003)	"Hong Kong is an extremely important partner for Japan with which Japan maintains close economic ties and people-to-people exchanges. It is the long-standing policy of Japan to attach great importance to upholding a free and open system which Hong Kong has been enjoying and the democratic and stable development of Hong Kong under the 'One Country Two System' framework." (https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002824.html)
"In Singapore, consensus building is especially important as the remaking is to lead to an economy more reliant on private enterprise and individual effort. This can only work if Singaporeans feel that the system is fair to all, and benefits everybody over the long run. Hence, we have worked hard to strengthen the social and political consensus in support of our remaking plans. We involved and consulted Singaporeans as widely as possible." (Lee Hsien Loong. 2003)	"Hong Kong's autonomy must not be undermined. The citizens of Hong Kong enjoy freedoms and rights, that are afforded to them through the Basic Law and on the principle 'one country, two systems.' We expect that law and order to be upheld." (https://www.dw.com/en/hong-kong-china-germany/a-53608848)
	"Rebuilding trust across Hong Kong society by allowing the people of Hong Kong to enjoy the rights and freedoms they were promised can be the only way back from the tensions and unrest that the territory has seen over the last year." (U.S., United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, 2020)

Source: Author's own compilation.

Table 5.8 Quantitative Data Analysis for Indexes Regarding Diplomatic Engagements

Category	*Indexes (Ranking)*	*Singapore*	*Hong Kong*
National interests	Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) Singapore: 3rd (2019) Hong Kong: 5th (2019) (World Economic Forum. 2019)	As a small, densely populated island nation with few natural resources, Singapore has historically focussed on developing a strong economy to ensure its national security and prosperity.	Hong Kong's national interests are also closely tied to its economic success. The city is a key financial centre and gateway to mainland China, and has long prioritised policies that promote trade, investment and economic growth.
Geopolitics	Global Peace Index (GPI) Singapore: 9th (2021) Hong Kong: 77th (2021) (ReliefWeb, 2021)	Good relations with both China and the United States, build strong relationships with neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia, an active participant in regional organisations such as ASEAN.	The tensions between PRC and the United States have put Hong Kong in a difficult position, as it seeks to maintain its autonomy and economic ties while also navigating the broader geopolitical landscape.
Ideology	Democracy Index Singapore: 6.27/10 (2020) Hong Kong: 6.46 /10 (2020) (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020)	Singapore's government has been characterised as authoritarian, with a strong emphasis on maintaining social order and economic growth.	In recent years, there have been concerns about the erosion of these freedoms, particularly with regard to free speech and political participation.
Globalization	Globalization Index Singapore: 1st (2020) Hong Kong: 3rd (2020) (Global Europe, 2020)	Singapore's history is closely tied to its location as a key trading hub in Southeast Asia.	Hong Kong has sought to maintain strong economic and cultural ties with both China and the West and has a strong sense of identity and history as a former British colony.
International organisations	Global Diplomacy Index Singapore: 10th out of 60 (2021) Hong Kong: not included (Lowy Institute, 2021)	Singapore is a member of several international organisations, and it has been an active participant in these organisations and has sought to play a leadership role in regional and global affairs.	Hong Kong is not a sovereign state, but it is a special administrative region of China. As a result, its participation in international organisations is limited.
Global issues	Climate Change Performance Index Singapore: 58.5/100 Hong Kong: not included (China 28.5/100) (Climate Change Performance Index. 2022)	The city-state has played a leadership role in promoting sustainable development and has launched several initiatives aimed at reducing its carbon footprint.	The city's unique political situation has made it a focus of attention in debates about democracy and human rights.

Source: Author's own compilation.

foreign investment, promoting trade and developing high-tech industries. Singapore government can be viewed as a form of semi-authoritarian controlled democracy with a strong emphasis on maintaining social order and economic growth. On the other hand, Hong Kong is a key financial centre and a gateway to mainland China and has long prioritised policies that promote trade, investment and economic growth. Its political system is unique where a "one country, two systems" arrangement permits a degree of autonomy from mainland China. In recent years, however, tensions between China and the United States have put Hong Kong in a difficult position in the course of maintaining its autonomy and economic ties while navigating across the broader geopolitical landscape. Hence, both Singapore and Hong Kong have strong historical ties to their respective regions, and both are members of several international organisations; nonetheless, Singapore plays a more prominent role in regional and global affairs.

In terms of sentiment analysis on diplomatic engagement, Singapore achieves a score of 0.265, reflecting a notably positive sentiment. On the contrary, the score of –0.1 for Hong Kong reveals a negative sentiment. According to Table 5.9, the quotes reveal the differences between Singapore

Table 5.9 Political Leaders' Comments on Singapore and Hong Kong's Diplomatic Engagements (Qualitative Data)

Singapore	*Hong Kong*
"I will always be proud that Lee Kuan Yew was my friend. 1 respected his effective leadership of his wonderful, resilient and innovative country in ways that lifted living standards without indulging a culture of corruption. I was also proud of the progress Singapore and the United States achieved together as partners. Because of the example set by Lee Kuan Yew's singular leadership, let me add I am confident that the future will be bright for Singapore."	"The relations between British and local officials have been 'more difficult' recently, especially in wake of the new law. I personally feel it is not the Hong Kong that people know and love."
(https://time.com/3753703/lee-kuan-yew-death-global-reaction/)	(https://www.scmp.com/news/hongkong/politics/article/3112945/outgoing-british-consul-general-hong-kong-warns-national)
"Mr. Lee Kuan Yew is a uniquely influential statesman in Asia and a strategist boasting oriental values and international vision."	"The country could offer 'a path to citizenship' for British National (overseas) passport holders in Hong Kong."
(https://www.wsj.com/articles/world-leaders-mourn-passing-ofsingapores-lee-kuan-yew-1427071732)	(https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-52842303)
"Mr. Lee Kuan Yew is a uniquely influential statesman in Asia and a strategist boasting oriental values and international vision." (Hong Lei)	

Source: Author's own compilation.

and Hong Kong in their diplomatic aspirations and arrangements. Singapore is widely respected for its effective leadership, success in transforming into a prosperous nation with low levels of corruption and strong diplomatic ties with major powers. Hong Kong, on the other hand, is currently facing challenges to its democratic values and human rights. This has an inevitable impact on its international reputation as an open and democratic society. Hence, the diplomatic engagements of the two countries may also differ, with Singapore having stronger ties with major powers than Hong Kong.

5.5 Findings and Discussion

In reiteration, this research links the concept of hedging with politics, economics, society and diplomacy. In deriving these multi-faceted dimensions, this article takes a leaf from Murphy (2017). First, domestic politics can influence a state's hedging strategy, as seen in the case of Thailand, where a military coup led to a decline in ties with the United States (Murphy, 2017, p. 167). Next, hedging bear economic implications as Southeast Asian states seek to secure economic benefits from multiple powers (Murphy, 2017, p. 181). Third, hedging can have societal implications, as Southeast Asian states seek to balance the interests of different domestic groups, such as ethnic minorities and nationalist groups (Murphy, 2017, p. 181). Finally, hedging involves an active engagement in socialising with rising powers to gain acceptance by the established international order (Murphy, 2017, p. 177). Similarly, these dimensions bear implications for the hedging strategies adopted by Singapore and Hong Kong against their security challenges. First, being a small state and regime without hinterland (in especial, Singapore), they need to maintain stable political and economic ties with global major powers. Second, given the scarcity of natural resources, Singapore and Hong Kong suffer sizeable risks in over-dependence due to over-specialisation The securing of economic ties with multiple powers through industrial diversification remains the key to mitigating this challenge. In addition, the existing racial mix and the increasing human mobility have made both Singapore and Hong Kong cultural melting pots. It advertently raises the challenge of maintaining their economic edge without aggravating ethnic and class politics. Failure to adopt an effective hedging strategy in social integration will gravely jeopardise political economic sustainability. Finally, being vulnerable to uncontrollable external forces due to their limited size, they face the challenge of receiving global acceptance and protection. Thus, diplomatic engagement remains key in ensuring their survival as they chart the routes of exceptionality.

The comparative characteristics in terms of political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagements between Singapore and Hong Kong in hedging strategies are listed in Table 5.10 as follows:

Singapore has achieved a high degree of stability and prosperity over the past decades. This is the result of active measures to maintain low levels of corruption, crime and poverty while seeking high levels of education, healthcare

Table 5.10 Summary of Comparison between Singapore and Hong Kong in Political Hybridisation, Industrial Diversification, Social Integration and Diplomatic Engagements

	Singapore	*Hong Kong*
Political hybridisation	Coherently managed semiauthoritarianism	Disruptive hybridised democratic and authoritarian system
Industrial diversification	High level of diversification and competitiveness	Challenges in maintaining model and competitiveness
Social integration	High level of integration	Difficulties in managing diversity and addressing disparities
Diplomatic engagements	Established a network of bilateral and multilateral relationships	The predicament in establishing identity and role in the international arena

Source: Author's own compilation.

and social mobility. The Singapore government has managed to control and resolve conflicts and controversies peacefully and orderly. This has enabled the country to build overall cohesion and harmony across the different sectors of the society. On the other hand, combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism, Hong Kong's hybrid system of governance has been criticised for lacking legitimacy and accountability. This has led to widespread protests, demands for universal suffrage, and calls for greater autonomy and independence from China. These chaotic political events can be interpreted as a disruptive transition of political hybridisation. Hence, the political instability in Hong Kong has negatively affected the economy, undermining investor and tourist confidence and disrupting supply chains and transportation.

Next, Singapore has leveraged its strengths and comparative advantages, such as its strategic location, skilled workforce, stable political environment and pro-business policies, to attract and retain foreign investment and talent. This has contributed to Singapore's high level of productivity and innovation, as well as its competitiveness and attractiveness as a global hub. The country has also captured new growth opportunities to tap into emerging markets and technologies, such as renewable energy, digital health and advanced manufacturing. This has helped to keep Singapore's economy dynamic and relevant, and it has supported the country's long-term growth and development. On the other hand, Hong Kong's economy is highly dependent on a few sectors, such as finance, trade and tourism, which makes it vulnerable to external shocks and competition. Hong Kong also has a relatively low level of innovation and R&D, compared to other advanced economies, limiting its ability to diversify and upgrade its industries. Hong Kong's limited natural resources have also constrained its ability to diversify its economy and expand its industries. The regime relies heavily on imports for its raw materials and energy, and it must compete with other cities to access these resources, contributing to its high cost of living and environmental degradation. Hence, comparatively, Singapore has adopted a hedging strategy that has allowed the country to

reduce its dependence on a single sector or market and to spread its risks and opportunities across multiple industries and regions. This diversification has enabled Singapore to weather economic downturns and shocks, and to adapt to changing market conditions and consumer preferences.

Moreover, Singapore has achieved good social integration, contributing to the country's stability and harmony. It has been achieved through policies and programmes that foster mutual understanding and intercultural communication. Through policies and upgrading programmes, the quality and accessibility of education and training has been enhanced. This further stimulates innovation and entrepreneurship. Good social integration has also catapulted Singapore's reputation and influence into the global arena. Such elevation has further attracted foreign investments, tourism and talents to the country while facilitating the country's participation in regional and global networks and organisations. On the other hand, Hong Kong has faced challenges regarding social integration due to the high levels of income inequality, a lack of trust and solidarity among different social groups and a sense of alienation and resentment towards the government and elites. This has been exacerbated by the perceived lack of representation and accountability in the political system and discrimination and injustice in the legal and social systems. The ongoing protests and clashes with the police have disrupted the normal functioning of society, and these violent incidents have strained relations between different social groups and the government. Inevitably, this has raised concerns about the stability and sustainability of Hong Kong's social model.

Finally, Singapore has a strong history of diplomatic engagements with many countries worldwide. Capitalising on its strategic location in Southeast Asia and actively participating in multilateral organisational interactions, Singapore builds strong relationships with major powers while establishing an expanding network of bilateral and regional free trade agreements. In addition to these formal diplomatic efforts, Singapore has forged friendships through several informal channels for dialogue and cooperation with other countries. These diplomatic engagements have helped enhance Singapore's status as a regional hub where the nation-state plays a prominent role in shaping global governance and policy. In contrast, as a territory rather than a sovereign nation, Hong Kong has limited influence on the global stage, as it is dependent on the foreign policy of the central government in Beijing. This has inadvertently limited Hong Kong's ability to shape its foreign relations and pursue its interests at the international stage. Hong Kong does not have diplomatic representation abroad, and the political tensions and unrest in the territory in recent years have also impacted its international relations.

Overall, the sentiment analysis reveals that both Singapore and Hong Kong have predominantly positive sentiments in their respective texts. Nonetheless, Singapore's scores are notably more positive compared to Hong Kong. From this analysis, we can infer that Singapore portrays a more positive image and outlook as compared to Hong Kong in the context of political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagement. The

notably positive sentiments position Singapore in a more favourable stance in mitigating domestic and global challenges. Meanwhile, the less positive sentiments in relation to Hong Kong may be indicative of areas for improvement in the relevant aspects.

5.6 Conclusion

This research elucidates the significance of hedging strategies for small states and regimes amidst both internal and external challenges. This is especially relevant in the contemporary global landscapes marked by multi-polar geopolitical tensions, conventional and non-traditional wars, climate change and other unpredictable challenges. In response to the lacuna in extant literature, we have introduced an intra-Asia comparative-case-based research, with quantitative and qualitative methods, to examine the holistic factors behind the hedging strategies of Singapore and Hong Kong. Through the research findings, we have established that Singapore's success in securing Asia's top financial position lies in its ongoing commitment to political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagements.

First, Singapore's coherent management of hybridisation as a semi-authoritarian government has engendered political stability and efficiency in decision-making. In contrast, Hong Kong's political situation has become increasingly unstable and uncertain due to abrupt disruptions occasioned by PRC's political intervention. Next, Singapore has adopted more industrial diversification—in contrast to Hong Kong—to mitigate the country's scarcity of resources. With an emphasis on high-tech industries (for example, biotechnology and electronics) and other emerging global needs, this hedging strategy has allowed Singapore to weather economic downturns more effectively while maintaining a competitive edge in the global market. In terms of social integration, Singapore has actively promoted social cohesion and multiculturalism through policies that encourage racial and religious harmony. In contrast, Hong Kong has faced significant social unrest in recent years due to issues of inequality and political repression. Finally, Singapore has fared well at diplomatic engagements as she has a strong track record of effective diplomacy, which has helped her to maintain positive relationships with a wide range of countries. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has faced increasing changes and isolation due to its organic political affiliation with the Chinese government's approach to foreign relations. Overall, while both Singapore and Hong Kong have significant advantages in terms of their respective economies and geopolitical contexts, Singapore's political hybridisation, industrial diversification, social integration and diplomatic engagements have given it a clear edge over Hong Kong. Nonetheless, these hedging strategies are concomitant with Goh's (2005) argument where Southeast Asian smaller countries navigate amid complex geopolitical landscape through seeking external counterweights, forging complex engagements and making efforts to enmesh regional powers to prevent potential dominance, withdrawal or instability.

Several implications derived in this study are relevant for small states and regimes in their adoption of hedging strategies. In one sense, hedging strategies can enhance the resilience and security of small states and regimes by reducing inherent vulnerabilities while providing them with alternative options and resources in times of crisis or conflict (Ciorciari, 2019). However, hedging strategies have limitations and risks, as they involve trade-offs and costs and may not always provide the desired outcomes (Martínez-de-Albéniz & Simchi-Levi, 2006). Political hybridisation, for example, can enhance the stability and survival of small states and regimes, but it may also compromise their democratic values and standards, and undermining their legitimacy and representation (Booth & Seligson, 2009). Industrial diversification can enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of small states and regimes, but it may also expose them to external shocks and competition and create social and environmental costs (Charles, 1997). Social integration can enhance the harmony and prosperity of small states and regimes, but it may also pose challenges in managing diversity and addressing social and economic disparities (Jones, 2008). Diplomatic engagements can enhance the security and influence of small states and regimes. Still, they may also involve complex and competing interests, values and expectations and may be affected by power imbalances and domestic politics (Kuik, 2008). Hence, the key contribution in this research lies in the exemplification of a holistic approach—political, economic (industrial), societal and diplomatic—spanning both domestic and external dimensions to forge an effectively coherent hedging strategy against the inevitable limitations of small states and regimes.

The adoption of hedging strategies by small states and regimes is a complex and an ongoing process that requires a careful consideration of various factors. Small states and regimes must weigh the potential benefits of stability and security that can be achieved through hedging against the costs and risks associated with losing their democratic and human rights. According to Colin Elman in his 1995 article "Hedging in International Relations," small states and regimes must balance the need for stability and security with the need for democracy and human rights (Elman, 1995). To effectively adopt hedging strategies, small states and regimes must also consider the context and goals of their strategies. The international environment and regional dynamics can change rapidly, which can have significant impacts on the success or failure of hedging strategies. For example, in the face of regional tensions or security threats, small states and regimes may adopt a more cautious and defensive hedging strategy to protect their interests. Conversely, in a more stable and secure regional environment, they may adopt a more assertive and proactive hedging strategy to advance their interests (Elman, 1995). Small states and regimes must also be prepared to adapt their hedging strategy to changing circumstances and challenges. As noted by Elman (1995), the process of adopting hedging strategies is dynamic and requires ongoing analysis and adaptation in response to changing regional dynamics. Hence, to effectively implement hedging strategies,

small states and regimes must be able to assess the costs and benefits of their strategies and make adjustments as needed to ensure their goals and interests are protected.

In conclusion, the adoption of hedging strategies by small states and regimes is a complex and ongoing process that requires careful consideration of various factors, including the costs and benefits, context and goals of the strategies. By balancing the need for stability and security with the need for democracy and human rights, and by adapting their strategy to changing circumstances and challenges, small states and regimes can effectively navigate the complex and rapidly changing international environment.

Several limitations to this study suggest further research on hedging strategies and small states and regimes. One limitation is the scope of the study, which focuses on Singapore and Hong Kong as case studies, but it has not included a comparative analysis of other small states and regimes in different regions and contexts. Future research could consider a broader range of cases to test the generalisability of hedging strategies among small states and regimes. Another area for improvement is the conceptual and empirical complexity of the study, which requires more nuanced and multidimensional approaches to measuring and analysing the independent and dependent variables. Future research could use more advanced research designs and methods, such as experimental or quasi-experimental approaches, to provide more robust and causal evidence of the relationships and mechanisms involved in hedging strategies and small states and regimes. Finally, another limitation is the limited access to data and sources, which may affect the findings' reliability and validity and the conclusions' generalizability. Future research could seek to overcome these limitations by using more diverse and comprehensive sources of data and information and engaging with stakeholders and experts in small states and regimes. Future research could also consider incorporating voices from different sectors and walks of life to complement the documentary desk research where state actors, elites and other institute-based representatives are predominantly presented.

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6 A Hub for Diversity

Social Cohesion as a Statecraft for Nation-Branding in Singapore

Chang-Yau Hoon and Ying-kit Chan

6.1 Introduction

With a population of 5.69 million comprising 4.4 million "residents"—citizens and permanent residents—and 1.64 million "non-residents", encompassing dependants, expatriates, migrant workers and international students, Singapore is ethnically and religiously diverse. According to the 2020 Census, among Singapore's residents, the ethnic Chinese constituted 74.3 per cent of the population, followed by 13.5 per cent Malays and 9 per cent Indians. The country's religious diversity is evident in its attainment of the highest score on the Religious Diversity Index published by the Pew Research Center in 2014 (Global Religious Diversity Report 2014). Buddhism is the largest religion in Singapore, comprising 31.1 per cent of the population; 18.9 per cent of the population identified as Christians, 15.6 per cent as Muslims, 8.8 per cent as Taoists, and 5.0 per cent as Hindus (Department of Statistics Singapore 2021).

While diversity has been a social fact and quintessential part of Singapore, racial and religious differences were identified by former Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his 2009 National Day speech, as "the most visceral and dangerous fault line" in the country's social fabric. He also acknowledged the lack of conversation on race and religion in the public sphere due to the "sensitivities" perceived by Singaporeans on such topics (Lee 2017, 1–2). Although race and religion are frequently used by the state as an instrument to promote nation building, they are also regarded as delicate in the state's attempt to maintain its ethno-religious balance (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 4). These sensitivities are largely informed by episodes of violent racial and religious tensions in postcolonial Singapore, including the Maria Hertogh riots of 1950, the race riots of 1964, and the spillover from the 13 May incident of 1969 in Malaysia, as these narratives are persistently evoked in state campaigns and official speeches (Lai 2004). These incidents inadvertently legitimised state policies for social engineering in order to "contain racial tension through the management of the religious composition of its population" (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 5). Hence, the state adopted a regulatory approach to diversity through a series of legal and policy instruments to curtail any potential religious and racial hostility that poses a threat to public order. Among these are the Societies

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Act, which allows the state to proscribe religious groups that may interrupt social harmony; the Penal Code and Sedition Act under the criminal justice system; the Internal Security Act, which allows for preventive detention; and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act that deals with conducts that threaten Singapore's religious harmony (Tan 2008, 64–5).

The putative racial and religious harmony in Singapore has been recognised in the inaugural report on Southeast Asian Cohesion Radar (2022, 9), published by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), which ranked Singapore "the most socially cohesive" among the 10 The Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN countries. The report defined social cohesion broadly as "a sense of solidarity, resilience, and togetherness by members of a community", synonymous to "social harmony, unity, and inclusion". A more comprehensive definition refers to it as a "social glue that bonds society together with a shared sense of community and belonging, and a degree of shared commitment and vision to promoting the common good", which involves "stakeholdership in which members must feel they belong to their society, with a stake in it and as involved participants in its development" (Lai 2004, 2). Decades of delicate state management have enabled Singapore to show the world its achievement in creating a socially cohesive environment for inhabitation among its diverse population, conducive for foreign investments in its quest to become a hub for business, technology, innovation, infrastructure, education, and culture.

Social cohesion can be, and has been, used as a statecraft for nation-branding and as a form of soft power; it is hardly inward-looking at all. This is illustrated in the hosting of the state-funded International Conference on Cohesive Societies (ICCS) organised by the RSIS and supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth in 2019, 2022 and 2025. Mooted by former President Halimah Yacob, each conference sponsored over 800 participants comprising religious leaders, policymakers, academics, and civil society practitioners from 40 countries, with a stated agenda to promote peace and harmony, as well as to showcase Singapore's success stories in managing diversity. Cognisant of the need for sustainability, the ICCS also encompassed a Young Leaders Programme, in which youth leaders from the region were empowered to drive social cohesion initiatives in their communities. The first ICCS in 2019 also saw over 250 religious organisations committing to safeguard religious harmony in Singapore (Zaccheus 2019).

Distinct from the 2019 conference was the inclusion of community explorations in the 2022 and 2025 conferences, in which participants were invited to visit designated places of worship, dialogue with community leaders, and experience "multicultural living" in Singapore (www.iccs.sg). The ostensive commitment of the Singapore government on the ICCS was not only evident with the president, ministers, and senior government officers at the conferences but also the financial commitment it invested, which include renting the Raffles Convention Centre and accommodating all foreign invitees in lavish hotels in the conference vicinity. Besides the overwhelmingly positive anecdotal feedback gathered by the first author, who was among the

international participants, the conference also received praise from regional media coverage (see Mangosing 2022; Zurairi 2022; Arditya 2022; and Othman 2022).

This chapter examines how Singapore manages its racial and religious diversity in building a cohesive society. It considers the role of state and non-state actors by exploring the genesis and development of state- and grassroots-driven interfaith initiatives in Singapore. The first section addresses the CMIO racial policy adopted by the postcolonial Singapore government and highlights the unprecedented challenges posed by an increasingly complex and diverse globalised society. The second section delves into discussing religious diversity and the politics of interfaith dialogue in Singapore. It argues that Singapore, as a secular state, manages religion pragmatically by closely scrutinising religious expression in the public space through a range of legal and policy instruments aimed at maintaining security and stability for economic development. The final section reconsiders the potential for social cohesion as a soft power statecraft moving beyond the prevailing model characterised by compliant and occasional cosmetic displays of harmony. It examines how the ideas of multiculturalism and interfaith harmony, rather than being a mere message of social harmony to a domestic audience, have been exported by Singapore as a form of soft power.

6.2 State Management of Ethnic Diversity

Singapore is often referred to as a "nanny state" because the government actively interferes with all aspects of life among its population through legislation, social engineering, and national campaigns (Kuah-Pearce 2009, 5). Since separating from Malaysia and becoming an independent and sovereign state in 1965, Singapore has adopted a policy of multiracialism and multireligiosity as an "instrument of social control" (Chua 2003) to manage its diverse population. Colonial British administration had instituted policies that addressed racial divisions, but they did not interfere with local customs and religions. The population was largely left to their own devices on religious matters as long as social order was not disrupted (Kong et al. 2020). Postcolonial Singapore inherited the colonial racial policy that classified the population into four official races known as the CMIO (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Others). A myriad of social policies were designed to reinforce racial differences through essentialised cultural characteristics such as language, religion, and values. The ethno-racialisation of the population has been pervasive and all-encompassing in the daily lives of Singaporeans, from official registration to education, housing, religion, cultural festivals, and public spaces. To be a functioning Singaporean, an individual is expected to claim membership in one of the four major races (Singh 2016).

According to the classificatory logic of Singapore's multiracialism policy, ethnicity is reified and conflated with race, language, and religion so that the categories of Chinese/Mandarin/Buddhism or Taoism, Malay/Bahasa

Melayu/Islam, and Indian/Tamil/Hinduism would appear as natural and fixed (Ang and Stratton 1995). The "mother tongue" policy and Speak Mandarin Campaign are examples of how the diverse dialect groups within the Chinese community were homogenised into a monolithic racial identity. The CMIO multiracial policy has, paradoxically, solidified what used to be a rather porous ethnic boundary with organic cultural mixing and borrowings, into watertight categories where "hybrid culture and identity could be interpreted as a threat to the mosaic model of multiracialism" (Lian 2016b, 15). The policy has the effect of "'disciplining' differences and rendering complexity, hybridity and multi-ethnic diversity difficult for social acceptance and appreciation" (Lai 2004, 9).

Instead of being multicultural, the putative multiracialism policy is ironically "monocultural" in that it does not allow for the recognition of cultural hybrids who are characterised by their in-betweenness, or individuals who belong to more than one state-prescribed racial identity. For example, Singh (2016) examines the identity conundrum of the Tamil Muslims who are marginalised to the interstices between the "Malay" and "Indian" categories of the CMIO quadratomy, as the state circumscribe their identity through its cultural policies and the state-sponsored Islamic Religious Council (MUIS). Often, people who do not fit into the CMIO categories are expected to "assimilate" into one of the officially available categories, typically determined by a patrilineal system based on the father's race. For Chua Beng Huat (2003), this is the price of membership for belonging to an ascribed ethnicity so that the individual will not be cast by their community as selfish or free-rider. The discrete ethnic cultures reified by the state is put on cosmetic display annually when the Racial Harmony Day is commemorated as schoolchildren are encouraged to dress in their "traditional" costumes: cheongsam for the Chinese, sari for the Indians, and baju Melayu for the Malays. Such representation reminds us of the criticism of multiculturalism that it "confuses cultural difference with cultural diversity and thus naively assumes the displays of different cultures are the solution to cultural difference" (Kuo 2003, 230). Instead of showcasing a selection of monoracial or monocultural individuals as a symbol of CMIO diversity, multiculturalism should acknowledge the existence of diversity within each individual or ethnic group (Hoon 2006).

Even though the state has attempted to afford equality among the racial groups, multiracialism does not necessarily empower minority groups or redistribute power and resources. This is because minority rights and the boundaries of difference are often determined by the hegemonic and dominant majority. Under the famed banner of meritocracy, the state and the public (especially the Chinese majority) have long been in denial of the existence of racial privilege in Singapore. Public discourse on "Chinese privilege" had only emerged in recent years when issues of discrimination and inequality experienced by minority ethnic groups gradually surfaced publicly, such as in social media, performance art, and scholarly articles (Koh and Thanapal 2015; Saharudin 2016; Goh and Chong 2022; Liu and Huang 2022). Seeing the potential

danger of the "Chinese privilege" discourse in undermining Singapore's ruling ideology of meritocracy and decades of state narrative on racial equality, former Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong rejected the "Chinese privilege" discourse in his 2021 National Day Rally speech as "entire baseless", emphasising that the state treats "all races equally, with no special privileges" (Tang 2021). Perhaps the discourse of "Chinese privilege" is never meant to be taken literally but to serve as a reflexive reminder of the inequality regime reproduced by the hegemonic race inspired by Peggy McIntosh's (1989) famous essay on "White Privilege" that defines privilege as an invisible knapsack of unearned assets.

Amid the falling fertility rate and an ambition to develop itself into a global hub that is competitive in the international economy, Singapore has opened its door to attracting foreign talents and workers since the 1980s. Besides the traditional sources of migrants from China and India, the arrival of expatriates from all around the world has bestowed on the country the label of a global city. Comprising almost one-third of the country's population, the "non-residents" have diversified the demographic composition of Singapore, even though official data on their ethnic origins are not revealed. Singapore's migration policy differentiates the middle- to high-income professionals from the low-income workers. It privileges the former by giving them preferential access to permanent residence status and eventually naturalising them as citizens. The low-income unskilled or semi-skilled workers, on the other hand, are treated as transient workers and are given a limited but renewable work permit (Lian 2016b, 27). Despite the growing diversity of the population contributed by migration over the past few decades in a globalising Singapore, the city-state has retained its original CMIO multiracial policy. Hence, the following question is raised, "What are the ramifications of this for the practice of multiculturalism, which only acknowledges three founding races and an open but selective category of Others, in Singapore?" (Lian 2016b, 27).

The immigration policy is also engineered to maintain the proportion of the CMIO racial composition among the population of "residents". Naturalised citizens and permanent residents are required to identify with an official race category based on their ancestry rather than on a self-identified culture or country of origin (Ho and Kathiravelu 2022, 641). Indeed, the rise of transnational migrants in the age of globalization has destabilised the bounded notion of nation-society-culture-identity, and by extension, the essentialising CMIO model, which reinforces static identities (Lian 2016a, 9). Studies on new Indian and Chinese migrants in Singapore revealed the limitation of the traditional CMIO framework that assumes ethnic homogeneity and ignores intra-ethnic differences (Liu 2014; Lim 2016; Seah 2016; Liu and Huang 2022). Episodes of widely publicised tensions between Indians of India and Singapore origin, and between mainland and Singaporean Chinese, show that racial categories are but empty signifiers because other identity markers such as place of attachment, language, religion, class, education, profession, and gender are more relevant. The changing social demography of

Singapore further points to the outdatedness of official multiracialism in the state's management of diversity.

6.3 The Politics of Interfaith Dialogue

Most scholars have traced the first modern manifestation of interfaith dialogue to the Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR) in Chicago, which was convened at the same time as the Great Columbian Exposition of 1893. While professing the noble dream of interreligious peace and harmony across the world, the PoWR ironically reflected the American imperialistic aspirations of becoming a religious and intellectual centre (Feldman 1967). Since then, interfaith initiatives have become a popular mode of engagement in religiously diverse contexts. From high-profile United Nations resolutions to state-sponsored and grassroots efforts in local neighbourhoods all over the world, the interfaith movement has moved into the mainstream of societies, including that of Singapore. For all its religious connotations, the interfaith movement has been shaped by, and has responded to, different historical, political, and social contexts (Fahy and Bock 2020: 3). The interfaith movement thus blurs, or complicates, the rigid and somewhat reductionistic distinction between the religious and the secular, insofar as it occupies a wide range of discursive spaces at the intersection of morality, theology, and global politics.

The PoWR might have been couched in colonial mentality and orientalist curiosity, but it has since assumed a proactive role of countering racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance in Asia, Europe, and North America. During much of the twentieth century, with the atrocities and genocides of the two world wars fresh in the minds of religious leaders across the world, interfaith dialogue emerged as a possible solution to resolving conflicts incited by perceived ethnic and religious differences. As evidenced by events such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution, religion remained a potent force in domestic politics and international relations, and Western societies awoke to the fact that religion was not giving way to secular modernity. In the late 1980s, the Rushdie Affair in Britain, which accompanied the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, illustrated to the Western world the divisive power of religious identities. Interfaith groups intensified their efforts to build social and cultural bridges across religious communities, and the September 11 attacks confirmed their suspicion that their mission was far from complete. Ironically, their efforts highlighted religion as a geopolitical fault line, which became a popular theme during the 1990s with the publication of political scientist Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) (Fahy and Bock 2020, 7–8). In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, 4,000 religious leaders in the United States signed an interfaith statement of solidarity in response to the incident, which became a harbinger of the global interfaith movement (Fahy and Bock 2020, 2).

As a multiracial and multireligious nation, Singapore brands itself as a religion-friendly secular country. However, the managerialist ways that the government handles religious issues may paradoxically infringe the freedom of religion (Hedges and Taib 2020). Although the government organises conversations, debates, and dialogues among different religious groups and individuals, such efforts appear more geared towards maintaining security and stability than promoting open and sustained mutual understanding. This reflects a view of religion as a potential fault line and positions the state itself as the ultimate arbiter of all religious affairs within the country. Hence, many of these state-sponsored activities belie the purpose of bridging religious differences and communal polarisation. As with many other countries, the interfaith movement in Singapore may be best understood as a sociopolitical phenomenon, in which religious actors and institutions occupy a privileged place in articulating and reacting to globalisation, flexible citizenship, transnational migration, and increasing religious diversity in a secularising global public sphere.

The Singaporean government takes a regulated and pragmatic view of religion, aiming to promote a version of religious pluralism that balances individual freedoms with the broader goal of social cohesion. Officials conscientiously remind religionists of their responsibilities toward nation and community, urging religious leaders to practise their faith in a way that benefits the public good (Thio 2008). Fears of social disharmony arguably date back to the colonial era when racial-religious riots occurred; they intensified with the September 11 attacks, amongst other incidents. With some 80% of its citizens professing a religious faith, Singapore is a highly religious society even though the state is secular. Secularism itself is an elusive term warranting further qualification. In multireligious Singapore, the government tries to mould religions into a constructive force that enriches the common good and individual spirituality rather than a divisive one that tears the nation's social fabric (Thio 2008). By confining the legitimate ambit of religion to matters of social welfare, the government forbids its participation in political causes and any form of zealous proselytising that may ignite inter-religious insecurities and sensitivities.

Singapore has a substantial Muslim population (15.6%), most of whom are Malays. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, Singaporean authorities and security forces uncovered a plot by the Jemaah Islamiyah, an Islamist militant group based in Indonesia, to attack the personnel and diplomatic missions of Australia, Britain, Israel, and the United States in Singapore. The government acted swiftly and detained the operatives, defusing the threat and thwarting the plot. The event revealed Singapore's vulnerability to extremist groups, and the government enacted not only security measures but also public policies that incorporated education and dialogue with Muslim leaders and the wider Islamic community (Desker 2003). Notably, it established the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (discussed below), a state-sponsored local-level interfaith platform, which claims to promote racial and religious harmony but was arguably set up with a security concern rather than an interfaith agenda. In 2022, the IRCC was rebranded as Racial and Religious Harmony Circles,

managed by the Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth (MCCY) with a somewhat softer touch.

Singapore's interfaith dialogue became an integral part of the broader plan to counter terrorism within the country, even though this had been understated to avoid offending Muslim sensibilities. This, however, was not a phenomenon unique to Singapore. From the Iranian Revolution to the Rushdie Affair, Muslims around the world found themselves increasingly called upon to defend their religion, and the rise of Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Asia strengthened many governments' resolve to engage the Muslims more proactively, sometimes unfortunately through discriminatory and repressive measures. Singapore was a progressive state in this regard, choosing to involve the Muslims in its interfaith initiatives and to separate them from what it calls "radical Islam" in official discourse (Ali 2023).

That said, efforts at interfaith dialogue could not be understood simply in terms of a response to religious extremism. Instead, the interfaith movement might be best analysed as a concerted reaction to the shifting sociopolitical conditions of globalising modernity (Fahy and Bock 2020, 10). Defining such efforts as a "movement" despite their occasional lack of coordination helps reconstitute religion as a rational, relevant, and even progressive force for social change, as opposed to its portrayal in secularist discourses. However, religion should not be seen as a mere resource in social movements. In the case of Singapore, while the state offers significant material and infrastructural support to respect and support the coexistence of religions, it also controls and prunes their growth, and religious actors and institutions deploy their agency in spreading religious faith within state parameters without alarming the authorities unduly with their expansion. The exclusivity in faith and membership that religions expect of their adherents, as well as the possible politicisation of religious expansion, remains for the state a potential flashpoint to be contained if not controlled (Guat 2019).

By observing antecedents and past state responses, religious actors and institutions can skirt "out of bounds" (OB) markers, which are essentially boundaries of political acceptability delineated by informal rules of engagement (Barr 2010). For them, interfaith dialogue affords an opportunity to display their cooperation with the state and willingness to discuss with other religious leaders on how to preserve the state-cherished ideal of religious harmony. Ironically, then, interfaith dialogue in Singapore, however spiritually informed or theologically rooted it may be, is never simply religious, as is the case in many other countries (Fahy and Bock 2020, 14). Nonetheless, not all religious leaders are open to interfaith dialogue. Some Christian leaders, for instance, are apprehensive about being labelled as "liberal", or for compromising their faith, if participation in interfaith dialogues presupposes relativising truth claims (Lee 2017; Guat 2019).

The Singaporean government adopts a generally commonsensical approach to regulating religion and its public face; secularism is pragmatic rather than dogmatic. When commemorating national disasters such as the 1997 Silk Air

plane crash in Sumatra, the December 2004 tsunami disaster, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, political and religious leaders stood shoulder to shoulder. This might be contrasted with the Canadian government's removal of all mention of faith and holy wording at a national service for victims of the September 11 attacks, which would be considered an example of religious intolerance in Singapore (Thio 2008). The trend coincided with the broader interfaith movement abroad in which pressing social issues must elicit some sort of interfaith response. For instance, autonomous interfaith summits trail the G20 meetings of world leaders, with interfaith organisations presenting themselves as interlocutors on challenges spanning economic growth, social harmony, and global diplomacy (Steiner 2020). While interfaith organisations might tackle a wide range of issues, they are invariably committed to the idea that interfaith cooperation can amplify religious voices and highlight the role of religious values in responding positively to such issues. They also share a common repertoire of tactics such as candlelight vigils, dialogue gatherings, and inoffensive statements of solidarity—all are peaceful and transferable methods of expression preferred by most governments in the world (Fahy and Bock 2020, 16).

Deploying the social movement theory, Hedges and Taib (2020, 140) suggest that Singapore's Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO)—a grassroots movement established and maintained by individual members of different religious communities—enjoys a kind of "embedded autonomy" in that it has to abide by rules set by the government while "maintaining a semblance of autonomy in crafting initiatives suited to the agenda of interfaith as a lever for social harmony". The government grafted the past racial/religious riots into its nation-building narrative, stressing that a strong government is needed to hold disharmony and violent tensions in check. From a conservative, communalist stance toward religion from 1965 to the 1970s, the government shifted to building religion into a moral ballast against the supposedly immoral side effects of modernisation and Westernisation during the 1980s. The introduction of the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) in 1990 was the government's pragmatic response to the excesses of its own moralistic mission, the latter of which was marked by religious exclusivism and aggressive proselytisation. From the early 2000s, catalysed by the September 11 attacks, the government moved to support interfaith initiatives in order to strengthen social cohesion (Hedges and Taib 2020, 143). As a "soft law mechanism," the MRHA legally restrains religious leaders—or any persons—from inciting hostility against other religions and engaging in political activism under the guise of religious teaching (Hedges and Taib 2020, 144).

Concerned upon its formation about the religiously driven violence and military conflicts across the globe from the World War II to the partition of India, the IRO was from the outset built upon an ideological rather than religious motivation. Since 1949, when it was formed, the IRO, headed by key leaders of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Taoism, amongst others, had fostered multiculturalism in Singapore, which

played well into the state narrative of avoiding the ever-present danger of inter-communal violence in Singapore (Hedges and Taib 2020, 147). While being a non-governmental organisation, the IRO is often invited to grace public events to showcase the city-state's religious and social harmony. Some events that the IRO core committee have been invited to give interfaith blessings and prayers include the opening of new stations on the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) system, the Formula One racing track, and, in the unfortunate event of officers passing out after training (Hedges 2019).

The IRO emphasised that it was not a federation of religious institutions that could undermine state power (Lai 2008, 608). The IRO had rarely been opposed to state policies; even in the 2014 public debate on the opening of a casino in Singapore, the IRO did not issue any statement, in contrast to the religious organisations that voiced their objection (Lai 2008, 610). By supporting policies such as anti-spitting campaigns, the Religious Knowledge curriculum in public schools, and organ donation, the IRO worked more with state agencies than with its own religious constituencies (Hedges and Taib 2020, 148). Its publications, particularly those appearing from the 1990s on, were primers to Singapore's religious traditions rather than commentaries on social issues, which had preoccupied its founding leaders. The IRO has thus assumed an implicitly institutional role, subsumed under the state agenda of preserving religious harmony.

Establishing the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCC) in 2002 exemplifies the state's response to the September 11 attacks against the threat of inter-communal violence riven by ethno-religious divides. For Hedges and Taib (2020, 150), this "posits precarious tolerance rather than secure religious harmony". The state narrative of building resilience and social cohesion vis-à-vis terrorism has hijacked, or at least relegated, the IRO's original mission of facilitating interfaith exchange among the different religions. With contentious issues on religion coming to the fore on social media, the government encouraged youth participation in the IRCC and revamped the IRO website to include more interactive elements in cyberspace. An example of such efforts is the Exploration-into-Faiths (EIF) initiative, founded ground-up by the Southeast Community Development Council in 2007. By involving members and practitioners of different religions in dialogue about sensitive and potentially divisive issues such as violence, religious conversion, and sexual orientation, the EIF is aimed at offering a safe space for discussing controversies and a safety valve for releasing pent-up frustration. The question, then, becomes this: if spaces for spontaneity are monopolised by state actors, can society be truly resilient in the absence of a strong state?

The bitterest irony, perhaps, is that for interfaith dialogue to develop further, the boundaries between religions, as well as the freedom to flourish without state control, which is sometimes disguised as support, must remain clearly demarcated. As evidenced by the historical trajectories of the IRO and IRCC, interfaith dialogue in Singapore became a movement thanks to state support, but it was also curtailed in its functions that became more political than

religious, in line with the official line of multiculturalism. The boundaries between religions are policed, advocated by the state to be in their best interests, but this also suggests that religious membership, which is heavily fused with racial proportion in Singapore, would stagnate unless significant demographic changes occur in the future.[1] The government's interventionist approach also creates a taboo out of religious affairs, and faith talk is ironically kept to a minimum in public settings through official platforms such as the IRCC. That said, as expressed earlier in this section, religious leaders and practitioners enjoy a fair degree of autonomy under conditions of soft authoritarianism. The state emphasis on interfaith dialogue ensures the relevance of existing religions to the nation's social development, and many religious leaders have leveraged this to expand their influence, either for personal gratification or for their institutions' sustained growth, through highly publicised charitable events and well-attended public seminars on religious topics. By inviting cabinet ministers and members of parliament into their "secular" executive committees, religious leaders demonstrate their role in contributing to the nation's progress, putting on full display their partnership with the state. Whether it was via their own efforts, the religions that they sought to represent would continue to exist, simply because the state has mandated their existence—now as interfaith dialogue.

6.4 Social Cohesion as a Statecraft?

As a statecraft that has gained considerable significance in international relations, soft power involves indirect or co-optive control to influence others through attraction rather than coercion (Nye 1990). For smaller states with limited hard power, soft power can be strategically utilised to make a positive impact on the world stage, especially when it promotes universal values with which other nations can readily identify and are drawn towards (McClory 2019, 27). According to the Soft Power 30 Report published in 2019, Singapore was ranked 21 in the world for soft power, third in Asia after Japan and South Korea, and first in the "enterprise" sub-index (McClory 2019). As a global hub of finance, business, logistics and innovation, attaining the top position in the enterprise ranking is expected. However, the country is ranked less favourably in the "culture" sub-index, which it landed on 28 out of 30. Portland, the consulting firm that conducted the ranking, recommended Singapore "to find ways to showcase its cultural diversity on the world stage" (Soft Power *30* 2019). Singapore academic and veteran diplomat Bilahari Kausikan (2019) concurs with this soft power strategy for Singapore, as he believes that "the social cohesion that results from multiracial meritocracy" is the foundation for the country's economic success.

As discussed in the introduction, the state-sponsored ICCS conference was a case in point on how social cohesion in Singapore could be used as a soft power statecraft for nation-branding instead of just nation-building. The curated conference programme encompassed speeches from national leaders

and leading Singaporean and international academics, dialogue sessions with religious leaders and practitioners, youth leaders programme, as well as community explorations for international participants to gain first-hand experience of Singapore's multicultural living. The 800 foreign delegates who were fully sponsored to attend the conference were selected to include policy makers from ministries in charge of religion and community, scholars and researchers of religious and social studies, interfaith advocates and practitioners, youth leaders and social activists, all of whom had their own circles of influence and were in positions to drive societal change. The investment made by the government to bring in these participants served an agenda beyond simply promoting peace and harmony. The showcase of Singapore's success story in managing diversity can be seen as a soft power mechanism to influence others through attraction, as revealed in the speech delivered by then–Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong at the final day of the 2022 ICCS: "Meanwhile, to our international friends, we are sharing what we have done in Singapore; we hope it will be useful for you and will provide food for thought as you go back to your respective countries and think about how you might chart your own way forward to build more cohesive societies" (L. Wong 2022). Amidst intensifying globalisation, Singapore brands itself as a unique nation possessing a comparative advantage in managing a racially-cum-religiously diverse population, and it has devoted considerable resources to "brand" and communicate this "fact" to the world.

Nevertheless, Lai Ah Eng (2004, 3) reminded us that social cohesion is "characterized by the presence of strong social bond—measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity, the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions, and the presence of institutions of conflict management". The centrality of social trust in building a cohesive society is echoed by Lawrence Wong (2022) as he pondered on how to "deepen the reservoir of trust in our societies, to strengthen social cohesion in our societies as we enter a more volatile world". While the role of the state is critical in instrumentalising institutional and policy backings in its diversity governance through legislation and public communications, the role of the civil society and religious institutions in building trust and bridging differences through a bottom-up approach is equally important. Scholars have raised concerns over an excessive managerial and regulatory approach to social cohesion in Singapore. Kong et al. (2020, 7) contend that such an approach "can be unhealthy for a society" because it presupposes "diversity is a problem that needs to be managed instead of celebrated". As Eugene Tan (2008, 73) asserts, "genuine inter-ethnic and inter-religious understanding cannot be engendered by artificially induced interactions from the top down". The concern is that social harmony enforced by state authority and discipline may breed apathetic tolerance rather than genuine understanding among differences (Kong et al. 2020, 9).

After decades of global migration, Singapore has experienced what scholars referred to as "superdiversity" or "diversification of diversity" (Vertovec

2007). Instead of driving towards greater tolerance and co-existence, such "new pluralisms" (in Lily Kong's terms, cited in Chin 2022) have brought with them heightened inter- and intra-ethnic tensions and conflicts, which Liu and Huang (2022) themed as the "paradox of superdiversity". These new complexities once again highlight the insufficiency of the traditional CMIO model, which focuses on static identities, to accommodate the super-diverse society of contemporary Singapore. Kong highlighted other intersecting dimensions of identity that can be potential fault lines to social cohesion beyond the conventional race and religion. They include "migration and multiculturalism, social and economic inequality, the digital divide and inter-generational relationships" (Kong cited in Chin 2022). These point to the fact that there are still many considerations unaddressed in the current narrative of social cohesion advanced by the Singapore state as a soft power statecraft. Building a cohesive society can never only be a state project in a vacuum. An inclusive approach driven by the grassroots will allow social cohesion to develop organically beyond the acquiescent model of apathetic tolerance and superficial display of harmony.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has first considered how the Singaporean government inherited the colonial governmentality of divide-and-rule and regulated racial and religious affairs by fusing them through the CMIO framework. While the state-enforced categories of race and religion created diversity issues, they have rendered interfaith dialogue possible, with religious leaders cooperating with the state and displaying their allegiance through "secular" charitable and social projects. Our analysis suggests that the Singapore government's efforts in generating interfaith dialogue and managing delicate racial and religious issues stem not only from domestic concerns of national security and political stability but also from a growing desire, amid intensifying globalisation and threats of terrorism and foreign intervention, to brand itself as a socially cohesive nation that is worthy of admiration and emulation by other countries. We suggest that beneath the widely celebrated narrative of racial and religious harmony lie complex political and geopolitical considerations. We hope that our perspective, though perhaps unconventional, will encourage further dialogue on the broader implications of social cohesion, both within Singapore and globally.

Note

1 According to the 2020 Census, the changes to religious membership over the past 10 years have not been significant: compared to 2010, there has been a 3% increase in residents who identify as non-religious, a 2.2% decrease in Buddhists, 2.1% decrease in Taoist, 0.6% increase in Christians, and 0.9% increase in Muslims (Department of Statistics Singapore 2021).

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Part III

Diaspora and Governance

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7 Singapore in Diasporic Chinese Foodways

Representation of New Chinese Migrants

Cheun Hoe Yow

7.1 Introduction

Singapore is a remarkably multiracial nation where ethnic Chinese, Malays, Indians, and others live and work together in the island country that is profoundly connected to the region of Southeast Asia and to other parts of the world as well. Globalisation and regionalism take place at the same time, all contributing to the formation and transformation of multiculturalism, which has been localised in Singapore. As a result, there are multiple and composite corridors in Singapore, receiving elements from elsewhere, blending them on the island, and disseminating them across the country and beyond its borders.

There are many facets that reflect Singapore's splendid and rich multiculturalism. This is evinced in the wealth of customs and traditions that each ethnic group has inherited from their respective ancestors and predecessors and passed on to younger generations. This is also demonstrated in the plethora of daily practices and lifestyles of the residents and foreigners in Singapore. Of all these cultural manifestations, culinary and foodways are essential aspects that are noteworthy for documentation and investigation on both ethnic and national scales. Indeed, Singapore presents an interesting gastronomic medley of flavours and smells.

In particular, the Singapore Chinese foodscape is a subject that warrants public interest and academic inquiry. Intriguing questions have revolved around how ethnic Chinese cuisines have demonstrated cultural heritages and made spatial representations across various spaces in the island country. Equally interesting is how Singapore Chinese cuisine embodied distinctive identities, either in mixed or new forms, evolving from interactions with other ethnic groups.

Time has been changing the ethnic Chinese foodscape in Singapore. From the British colonial era to the first few decades after Singapore's independence in 1965, ethnic Chinese foodways have been remarkably defined by cuisines of Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese people, which trace their migration trajectory and ancestral ties to Fujian and Guangdong provinces in South China.[1] Commencing from the 1990s, with new arrivals and

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immigrants from other parts of China, new foods and drinks, including those of Shanghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, Shandong, and the Northeast region, have made forays into Singapore foodscapes.[2]

Places tell changes too. Ethnic Chinese foodscapes have demonstrated a stunning diversity of spatial distribution in terms of where Chinese foods are cooked and served in Singapore. During the early years of diasporic Chinese communities and settlements in Singapore, Chinese culinary was largely prepared in ethnic Chinese family kitchens and during clan events, as well as religious rites. Beyond residences, social associations, and temples, ethnic Chinese could buy cooked food from street stalls and restaurants and, because of modernisation and governance, from hawker centres and food courts. Increasingly, eateries make up an important part of third places (Oldenburg 1997), apart from homes and working sites. Ethnic Chinese come to eateries to enjoy food and cultivate relationships among themselves and with other races and ethnic groups.

This article examines the existing contours of Singapore as a site that is constantly reconfigured by diasporic Chinese foodways, with a focus on representing new Chinese migrants. First, it discusses how concepts of foodway studies can be appropriated for a better understanding of the dissemination of culinary culture and practice through migrants and their descendants in various places, including Singapore. Second, it presents a set of research questions crafted to assess how gastronomic landscapes have been evolving in Singapore because of the various ways of immigrants blending in local spaces and corners. Finally, it surveys how new Chinese migrant foods have been distributed in Singapore's hawker centres and restaurants.

7.2 Concepts: Diaspora and Food

This article invokes foodway as an essential avenue for disseminating, cultivating, and promoting ethnic gastronomy. Indeed, foodway is an inseparable part of the "migrant corridor", a term coined by the historian Philip A. Khun (2008) to encompass social, economic, and cultural linkages between the Chinese diaspora and their native and ancestral homelands in China. More specifically, in locations where migrants and their descendants are establishing settlements and communities, or in their "in-between spaces" as discussed by the theorist Homi K. Bhaha (1994), forms and contents of cultural manifestation, ranging from new to existing, as an integral part of a larger society to hybrid, are also subject to temporal and spatial factors.

Of the existing literature, there are three areas of academic research relevant to this article. They are (i) food as culture, (ii) diasporic Chinese food, and (iii) Singapore foodscape. Up to this point in time, while there are substantial works done on the first two areas, no succinct study has shed light on the representation of new Chinese migrant cuisine in the ethnic Chinese foodscape in Singapore.

7.2.1 Food as Culture

American anthropologist Sidney Mintz (1986), an acclaimed foodscape scholar, has demonstrated how food production and consumption are determined by historical and cultural trajectories. He emphasises that foodways have been and still are an important part of the culture associated with migrants and their descendants, especially in terms of collective memory and local identity (Mintz 2008: 516):

> As the idea of ever-increasing movement of persons grows, we hear talk of the end of culture. I sense some contradiction between this obituary for culture, on the one hand, and the expectation that those in diaspora are committed to reclaim, at least figuratively, some particular locality, to which they will think back collectively. The fact is, I think, that locality is still very much with us ……. As students of food I think we can profitably keep both locality and culture firmly in mind, even as we try to understand the bewildering flux of people, objects, ideas, and capital in today's world.

Indeed, diasporas have given and will give rise to new culture through their migration corridors to the places where they reside. Foodways, the subject of this article, are contingent on how cultural processes take place in various environments and contexts, contributing to the formation and transformation of "ethnoscape" (Clifford 1994; Appadurai 1996; Brah 1996; Lowe 1998; Ahmed 2000). In fact, culture and identities demonstrated in foodways intricately correspond and resonate with racial and ethnic formation (Xu 2008).

As many theoretical and empirical studies have shown, food can be conceptualised as a "contradictory site of power negotiations" and "social action" (Bentley 1998; Marte 2011). Either confined or fostered by circumstances, food practices and cooking are creative products of "cultural work" (Christie 2004; Abarca 2006; Williams-Forson 2006). As discussed later in this article, social process and dynamics are associated with how the representation of certain cuisine has been changing in Singapore.

Implications and meanings revolving around foods have demonstrated the intriguing process of cultural memory and narratives. Many scholars have established relations among collective food routes, cooking rituals, and narratives of memories (Kacandes, 1999; Sturken 1999; Stewart 2000; Sutton 2001; Counihan, Esterik and Julier, 2019).

7.2.2 Diasporic Chinese Food

Diasporic Chinese food has gained interest in the public and academia and scholars have researched it substantially.

The edited volume by Sidney C.H. Cheung and Tan Chee-Beng (2007), *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition, and Cooking*, contains 14 articles addressing the similarities and differences of ethnic Chinese diet in mainland

China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. Another volumed edited by David Y.H Wu and Sidney C.H. Cheung (2002), *The Globalization of Chinese Food*, has uncovered changes in ethnic Chinese gastronomy because of the late 20th-century globalization. Chee Beng Tan 's edited volume, *Chinese Food and Foodways in Southeast Asia and Beyond* (2011), brings together articles to examine the routes of Chinese culinary reproduction, localisation and invention, and globalisation and the process of the "embedding and fusing of foods".

The importance of ethnic food in social and cultural aspects has been often accounted. A case study on the United States of America, Yong Chen's book, *Chop Suey, USA* (2014), argues that "Chinese Americans successfully turned Chinese food from a despised cuisine into a dominant force in the restaurant market, creating a critical lifeline for their community." Another case study, with a focus on California, Xiaohui Liu's work in 2016, *Foodscapes of Chinese America: The Transformation of Chinese Culinary Culture in the U.S. Since 1965*, asserts the role of food as a mirror of social relations and an agent for social and cultural change.

7.2.3 Singapore Foodscape

There has been research carried out on ethnic Chinese foodscape in Singapore. However, there is none in terms of the units of analysis and spatial survey that this chapter attempts to focus on, which is the presence and representation of new Chinese migrant cuisine.

In 2019, Singapore submitted its nomination to inscribe its hawker centres on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (The Straits Times 2019). An inscription was announced on 16 December 2020, when UNESCO described Singapore's hawker centre as "'community dining rooms' where people from diverse backgrounds gather and share the experience of dining over breakfast, lunch and dinner" (UNESCO 2020). All stalls within hawker centres throughout the country will also receive a "UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage label" that they can place on their stall fronts (The Straits Times 2020).

In fact, hawker centres and foods have been important topics for study, although there has been no in-depth discussion on the representation of ethnic Chinese culinary in eateries (Ohtsuka, Kinoshita, and Marumo, 2008; Henderson, Yun, Poon and Biwei. 2012). The existing literature includes the book by Lily Kong (2007), entitled *Singapore Hawker Centres: People, Places, Food, Singapore*. The book by Yang Chang (2020), entitled *Early Hawkers in Singapore, 1920s to 1930s*, is an English translation of Chang's drawings in the 1980s as a reflection of the hawkers and the food they served before World War II. A book published in 2024, by Ryan Kueh, entitled *From Streets to Stalls: The History and Evolution of Hawking and Hawker Centres in Singapore*, testifies to the continuity of both academic and public appetite for how foods have been service in hawker centres in Singapore.

The article by Roberta Wong Leung, Zalar U. Ahmed, and Shubhasree Seshanna (2001), "A Study of Ethnic Restaurants in Singapore", with a focus on restaurants of all ethnic groups, is a research work done over two decades ago. Also, not only on ethnic Chinese foodways, Lily Kong and Vineeta Sinha (2016) have provided a collection of essays on Singapore foodscapes in a volume entitled *Food, foodways and Foodscapes: Culture, Community and Consumption in Post-colonial Singapore*. The article by Hong Suen Wong (2007), "A Taste of the Past: Historically Themed Restaurants and Social Memory in Singapore", highlights restaurants as an articulation of memory and thus a site reflecting and reshaping the identities and subjectivities associated with Singapore.

7.3 Research Questions: Uncovering Dynamics

This study on ethnic Chinese gastronomic landscape or foodscape is to underscore the splendour and richness of multiculturalism in Singapore. It argues that food consumption and culinary practice are essential components of everyday life, thus demonstrating the core aspects of ethnic and national cultures, which have been evolving as an outcome of interaction between globalisation and localisation forces.

It aims to unravel how ethnic Chinese have carried gastronomic heritages from various localities and provinces in China and how they have made respective foodways in Singapore where street stalls, hawker centres, and restaurants are concerned. In addition, it attempts to administer a survey to find out how new Chinese migrant cuisines are represented in eateries, compared to localised ethnic Chinese dishes. From a larger perspective, it examines how cultures are inherited, situated, blended, and invented, for ethnic Chinese foodways to be embedded in the local circumstances and national contexts in Singapore.

In comparing new Chinese migrant and localised ethnic Chinese cuisines, this article attempts to address two questions: (i) How is Singapore Chinese culinary culture linked to various localities and provinces in China? (iii) How have ethnic Chinese foodways made presence in certain spaces and sites in Singapore?

These two questions are meant for reflecting on the identity politics revolving around Singapore's history in general, and foodways in particular. The dynamics of identity and heritage are evinced in two incidents. The first involved how new Chinese migrants perceived a particular kind of localised ethnic cooking in Singapore. The second concerned the perception of heritage in Chinatown, which is the field site for this article and will be elaborated more in the next section.

The first incident relates to the "Curry Dispute" and the subsequent "Cook and Share a Pot of Curry", in 2011 (Teng). In August that year, it was reported that a new Chinese migrant family was in a dispute with a Singaporean Indian family, as the former could not tolerate the smell of curry from the next door, where the latter cooked Indian food. The first response from the latter was to

shut their doors and windows whenever they cooked curry. The former asked the latter to stop cooking curry altogether, but the latter refused the request (Quek 2011a). They surfaced the dispute to the Community Mediation Centre. After the mediation, the settlement was for the Indian family to cook curry only when their Chinese neighbours were out and in turn, the Chinese family agreed to their Indian neighbours' request to try out the curry dish (Quek 2011b).

The media exposure sparked public responses, asking for the new Chinese migrants to adapt more to Singapore's multiracial society. While some online comments requested mutual understanding between Singaporeans and foreigners, some were resentful towards immigrants of different cultures (Alvin Lim, 2011; Yeong 2011). On 11 August, a freelance writer and some of her friends launched the "Cook and Share a Pot of Curry" campaign through Facebook, encouraging Singaporeans to cook curry at home on 21 August 2011, and invite foreigners to share the meals as a way "to celebrate curries as part of our way of life and to share this celebration with those who are new to our shores" (David Lim 2011; Ho 2011).

The second incident is a survey done in 2018 on whether Chinatown has kept its heritage identity as an early Chinese settlement in Singapore. The investigation was conducted by a team from Gettysburg College in the United States of America, facilitated by the Singapore Heritage Society and sponsored by the ASIANetwork Student-Faculty Fellows Program. According to the findings, only 10 out of 113 Singaporeans interviewed would recommend the eateries, and only five regarded its architecture as representative of Chinatown's heritage. A Singaporean interviewee mentioned that the area had been too commercialised with many new Chinese migrant restaurants, compromising the "original ethnic taste". The tourism and heritage board involved in the project were concerned that the localised traits and the lure of Chinatown were losing ground because of commercialism and housing redevelopment (Zaccheus, 2018).

7.4 Fieldwork: Chinatown in Singapore

To address the questions set for this article, an investigation was conducted in Chinatown in Singapore, with a research team surveying hawker centres and restaurants from late 2021 to late 2022.[3] This was followed by several visits in 2023 and 2024 to the same field site by the author of this article to observe how local people, tourists, and foodies patronised eateries.

Chinatown is selected as the field site because it reflects how an ethnic Chinese enclave has evolved. In fact, it is a site where ethnic Chinese heritage and identities have been constantly contested and negotiated on how they represent a globalised or localised Singapore. The dynamics have been demonstrated in the second incident, in the foregoing discussion in the prior section, and in many other cases that are beyond the scope of this article and worthy for another research work.

Chinatown was the earliest settlement for Chinese immigrants, largely from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, during the British colonial period from 1819 to 1963, the year when Singapore joined the Federation of Malaysia. After

Singapore attained independence in 1965, while other districts in Singapore have registered residences of ethnic Chinese along with Malay and Indians, Chinatown was still a place with distinctive ethnic Chinese and elements of China, embodied in the products and cuisines offered, and the activities. Over the past three decades, it has witnessed new Chinese migrants making forays as hawkers and restaurant owners. Also, it is a tourist site attracting visitors from across the world (Yeoh and Kong 2021).

In terms of geographic location, Chinatown is within the Outram district in the Central Area of Singapore and next to the ethnic enclave of Little India; the Central Business District, where banks concentrate in and around Raffles Place; and the shopping district of Orchard. As for the naming, Chinatown is known as Niucheshui in Chinese, meaning "bullock watercart", and as Kreta Ayer in Malay, meaning "water cart". This is because, in the 19th century, the water supply to that area was carried by bullock carts. Local people and foreigners have often and widely used the name of "Chinatown" to refer to the location.

Map 7.1 shows the area of Chinatown where the field works were conducted. It is a place with landmarks such as Chinatown Heritage Centre, Sri Mariamman Temple, Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, and Thian Hock Keng Temple. In particular, the survey was administered to four hawker centres or concentrations: (i) Chinatown Complex, (ii) Maxwell Hawker Centre, (iii) People's Park Centre, and (iv) Chinatown Food Street on Smith Street. In addition, the research also was done on the restaurants in shophouses, along streets within the boundaries of Chinatown.

Of the over 600 photos taken for this research, 8 photos were selected and are discussed in this section on how races and ethnic groups are represented in the space of Chinatown in terms of hawker centres and restaurants. Apparently, the foodscape reflects distinctive local Chinese and new Chinese migrant characteristics within Singapore's multiracial and multicultural contexts.

Figure 7.1 features Chinatown Complex, which comprises a marketplace on one floor and a hawker centre one floor up. There are over 260 food stalls in the hawker centre, so it is the largest in Singapore. During the fieldwork observing patrons buying food from the stalls in Chinatown Complex, Cantonese was sometimes spoken, as a legacy of the early Chinese settlement, while Mandarin was often used.

Figure 7.2 shows the Fucheng Food Stall while Figure 7.3 shows the Tanjong Pagar Nasi Lemak Stall, both in Chinatown Complex. The major dish offered by the Fucheng Food Stall is a spring roll, or popiah in Hokkien, which is a localised appetiser with prawns, jicama, vegetables, and eggs wrapped together. At the Tanjong Pagar Nasi Lemak Stall, the ethnic Chinese hawkers are selling nasi lemak, which is a dish originating from Malay cuisine and comprises fragrant rice cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaf, usually served with a hot, spicy sauce (sambal) and various garnishes, including fresh cucumber slices, small fried anchovies (ikan bilis), roasted peanuts, and hard-boiled or fried eggs.

Figure 7.4 features Spring Court Chinese Restaurant, which was established almost a century ago, in 1929, and claims to be one of the oldest surviving

Map 7.1 Field Site in Chinatown, Singapore.

Source: Where Singapore by Reddot website (http: https://www.wheresingapore.com/maps-chinatown, accessed: 1 August 2024).

Chinese restaurants in Singapore. It is at Upper Cross Street, offering localised Chinese dishes, such as roasted crispy skin chicken, boiled live prawns, and deep-fried soon hock fish.

All the restaurants in Figures 7.5–7.7 are managed by new Chinese migrants and chefs from China. In Figure 7.5, Dongbei Renjia Restaurant, at Upper Cross Street, offers dishes with China's Northeast food favour, including sautéed hot and sour shredded potato with green pepper, green bean

Figure 7.1 Chinatown Complex.
Source: Taken by the author's research team.

Figure 7.2 Fucheng Food Stall.
Source: Taken by the author's research team.

Figure 7.3 Tanjong Pagar Nasi Lemak Stall.
Source: Taken by the author's research team.

Figure 7.4 Spring Court Chinese Restaurant.
Source: Taken by the author's research team.

Figure 7.5 Dongbei Renjia Restaurant.
Source: Taken by the author's research team.

Figure 7.6 Three Sichuan Restaurants
Source: Taken by the author.

Figure 7.7 Jiang Su Restaurant.

Source: Taken by the author.

noodle with carrot and cucumber salad, shredded cabbage, and fried vermicelli with minced meat. Figure 7.6 shows three Sichuan restaurants in a row, along Mosque Street. offering hotpot and cuisines originating from Chengdu and Chongqing. Figure 7.7 is a more recently opened Jiang Su restaurant, at Temple Street, offering mainly cuisines from Huiyang in Jiangsu province, such as lion's head, braised shredded chicken with ham and dried tofu, and noodles with shrimp and pork dumplings.

It should be pointed out that in Chinatown there are restaurants run by ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, with cuisines with regional adaptation and invention. One of these is the Great Nanyang Heritage Café, shown in Figure 7.8, on Craig Road. The owner of the café is an ethnic Chinese who migrated from

Figure 7.8 Great Nanyang Restaurant.

Source: Taken by the author.

Penang, Malaysia. The dishes reflect regional Chinese flavour, including kaya toast, nasi lemak, chicken culet, mee siam, and sambal prawn petai.

7.5 Figures: Representation and Distribution

The research for this article was conducted when the COVID-19 pandemic struck—with its many travel and movement restrictions in Singapore—and into a post-COVID era where citizens and tourists resumed moving around freely. The survey to the hawker centre stalls and restaurants was administered when business and activities in Chinatown were back to normal. However, a point to note is that even in the post-COVID time, eateries in Chinatown

and other parts of Singapore are, for various reasons, not permanent: some stalls and restaurants have ceased operation and in other cases, new stalls and restaurants have opened.

The Chinatown site is a demonstration of how different Chinese dialects and in-groups are distributed and represented. In the past, especially before World War II, Hokkien merchants made obvious footholds along Havelock Road, Telok Ayer Street, China Street, and Chulia Street, while Teochew merchants were on Circular Road, River Valley Road, Boat Quay, and South Bridge Road. The Cantonese were scattered around South Bridge Road, Upper Cross Street, New Bridge Road, and Bukit Pasoh Road.[4]

The field investigation for this research has discovered no restaurant of certain Chinese dialect groups or in-groups congregating or aligning spatially in Chinatown. In fact, localised ethnic Chinese and new migrant restaurants intersect with each other in building blocks along streets in Chinatown and are interwoven into the multiple fabrics in the spatial setting. Also, while many patrons to the restaurants appeared to be local residents and foreigners of ethnic Chinese, there were significant numbers of them who were Westerners from abroad.

Table 7.1 shows 424 hawker stalls surveyed in Chinatown in 2022, featuring traditional Chinese and new Chinese migrant cuisines and cuisines of

Table 7.1 Hawker Stalls in Chinatown, Singapore, 2022

Category	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*
Non-food and beverage	1	Local Chinese desserts and drinks	17	Taiwanese	2	Western Mixed	1
Local Chinese (Unidentifiable)	159	Local Malay	12	Japanese	4	Middle East	1
Local Teochew	15	Local Malay/ Indian	4	Thai	6	Unidentifiable	2
Local Cantonese	31	Local Western	2	Korean	2	Beverage (Chinese)	44
Local Hokkien	8	Peranakan Chinese	4	Malaysian	1	Beverage (Malay/ India)	1
Local Hainanese	18	New Chinese Sichuan	14	Vietnamese	1	Fruit juice	12
Local Chinese Hokkien/ Cantonese	1	New Chinese Dongbei	3	Local Indian	2	Beverage (Others)	6
Local Hakka	1	New Chinese Gansu	1	Local Indian/ Pakistan	1	Vacant	24
Local Chinese vegetarian	6	New Chinese Zhejiang and Jiangsu	1	Local Indian/ Chinese	1	**Total**	**424**
Local Chinese bakery	5	New Chinese (Others)	9	Local Western	1		

other ethnic groups. Where new Chinese migrant stalls are concerned, there are 14 Sichuan, 3 Dongbei, 1 Gansu, 1 Zhejaing and Jianggsu, and 9 in other category. Together, these 28 new Chinese migrant stalls make up 6.6% of the total. The burgeoning new Chinese migrant stalls are significant compared to the past.

Local ethnic Chinese stalls still make up the majority, with 15 Teochew, 31 Cantonese, 8 Hokkien, 18 Hainanese, 1 Hokkien/Cantonese, 1 Hakka, 6 vegetarian, 5 bakery, 17 desserts and drinks, and 159 unidentifiable of their dialect origins. In total, there are 261, or 61.6%, local Chinese stalls.

Other ethnic elements are present as well in the hawker centre in Chinatown. In Table 7.1, there are 12 Malay, 4 Malay/Indian, 2 Western, 4 Peranakan Chinese (mixture of Chinese and Malay), 2 Taiwanese, 4 Japanese, 6 Thai, 2 Korean, 1 Malaysian, 1 Vietnamese, 2 local Indian, 1 local Indian/Pakistan, 1 local Indian/Chinese, 1 local Western, 1 Western mixed, and 1 Middle Eastern.

The new Chinese migrant cuisine has made a more pronounced presence in restaurants than in hawker centre stalls. In Table 7.2, out of 474 shophouses surveyed in Chinatown in 2022, there were 48 outlets that presented new

Table 7.2 Shophouses in Chinatown, Singapore, 2022

Category	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*	*Category*	*No.*
Non-food and beverage	173	Japanese	9	Spanish	2	Hong Kong	1
Local Chinese (Unidentifiable)	27	Thai	3	Italian	4	Western pub	1
Local Teochew	0	Korea	11	Vegetarian	1	Irish	1
Local Cantonese	7	Chinese/ Western	1	Western food/ wines	1	Indian mixed	1
Local Hainanese	1	Fruits	1	Indian	2	Coffeeshop	9
Local Chinese vegetarian	2	Tea	2	Asian mixed	4	Pub/ Karaoke	22
Local Chinese bakery	9	Hotel	1	Greek	1	Drinks (Chinese)	1
Local Chinese desserts and drinks	3	Bookshop and cafe	1	Mexican	1	Fruit juices	1
New Chinese Sichuan	20	Korean Western	1	Indonesian	1	Offices	36
New Chinese Dongbei	11	Wine and liquor	1	Western	1	Vacant	72
New Chinese (Others)	12	Western fast food	1	New Chinese Sichuan mixed with others	1	**Total**	**474**
New Chinese Hubei	1	French	3	Argentina	1		
New Chinese Hunan	2	Indonesia	1	United States of America	2		
New Chinese Shandong	1	Italian/ Cocktail	1	Vietnamese	1		

Chinese migrant dishes, taking up 10.1%. There were 20 Sichuan, 11 Dongbei, 12 classified as others, 1 Hubei, 2 Hunan, 1 Shandong, and 1 Sichuan mixed with others in the category of new Chinese migrant restaurants.

In Table 7.2, local ethnic Chinese restaurants are outnumbered by their counterparts offering new Chinese cuisine. There are only 40 local Chinese restaurants in total: 27 with unidentifiable origins, 7 Cantonese, 1 Hainanese, 1 Chinese vegetarian, 1 bakery, and 3 desserts and drinks. They account for 8.4% of the surveyed restaurants.

Globalisation has also caused the cuisines of other cultural and ethnic origins to make forays into Chinatown. Table 7.2 shows 9 restaurants featuring Japanese food, 3 Thai, 11 Korean, 3 French, 2 Spanish, 4 Italian, 2 Indian, 1 Greek, 1 Mexican, 1 Indonesia, 1 Argentina, and 1 Irish. There are 39 of them taking up 8.2% of the total number of stalls, and making the foodways more multicultural in Chinatown.

7.6 Conclusion

Few places in the contemporary world have demonstrated a linear history of development. Rather, many spaces have been evolving in diverse pathways, coming together and unfolding multiple identities. Drivers contributing to the creation and happening of multiracial and multicultural terrains are migration and globalisation. Therefore, for any study of place, or space, more attention has been given to networks, connections, and intersections (Foucault 1986). There is no exception for diasporic Chinese experiences, in which Chinese migrants and descendants have transformed spaces, in the countries of residence and in their native and ancestral lands, through lineages and linkages (Yow 2013; Trémon 2022).

Corresponding to the issues revolving around diversity and multitude, the concept of "corridor" has been adopted as the theme of this book, while the ideas of "foodway" are appropriated for this article. There are reasons for the successful making of Singapore as a prime hub for the region and the world, in terms of trade, finance, transportation, and education. The factors have been related to the corridors of cultural and ethnic elements that have linked Singapore to other parts of the world.

The case study of foodways has been conducted for the article to get a true sense of the existence and outcomes of corridors in Singapore. This study also focused on how new Chinese immigrants have made forays with their cuisines into Chinatown, which is historically linked with British colonialism and the earlier Chinese immigration. Chinatown is also embedded in Singapore's multicultural landscape with its localised culture of ethnic Chinese who are largely descendants of the early Chinese immigrants of the dialect groups of Cantonese, Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, and Hainanese.

New Chinese migrant cuisines are significantly represented in Chinatown in terms of food stalls in hawker centres and even more so in restaurants. The new tastes originating from such places of Sichuan, Shanghai, Shandong,

and Northeast China are brought in to feed the appetite of the growing new migrant population, the established local ethnic Chinese communities, local citizens, and tourists. Certainly, the new Chinese migrant cuisines are additions to a larger diasporic Chinese foodway that, over a few hundred years, have come to Singapore as a hub, through the corridor of Chinese migrants, descendants, and diaspora.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1 On early Chinese communities in Singapore, see Cheng (1985), Turnbull (1985), and Yen (1986).
2 On new Chinese new migrants in Singapore, see You Junhao (2021).
3 The fieldwork was completed with the support by Arabella Gunawan and Choo Hin Wang as student assistants.
4 Wikipedia, "Chinatown, Singapore", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinatown,_Singapore (accessed: 20 August 2024).

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8 The Singapore Model of Tripartism in Digital Skills Development

Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Celia Lee

8.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was both a global health crisis and an international economic threat. Business and industry shutdowns were implemented and mandated across the world to curb the spread of the virus and generated an array of unique challenges for employees and employers. The prolonged pandemic caused a strain on the economy and businesses, and adversely impacted business continuity and sustainability (Liu, Lee and Lee, 2020, 160). It also disrupted labour markets globally and brought about massive disruptions, leading to changes in business models and consumer behaviours that are likely to stay, even after the pandemic. The short-term consequences were sudden and often severe: Millions of people were furloughed or lost their jobs, and others had to adjust to working from home on very short notice because of lockdowns and distancing measurements. As the government measures became more severe over time, numerous employers suffered a severe decline in revenue and had to take drastic measures to survive during that period (Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2021, 233–234).

The pandemic has raised the levels of digitisation in workplaces across all sectors to meet stricter health rules and reduce physical interactions. New jobs are evolving, and existing skills are getting obsolete exponentially. Upskilling and reskilling have become vital for Singapore businesses to survive and thrive in the increasing uncertain economy. Therefore, as workers adapt to changing job conditions, companies are also learning to match workers to new roles and functions through retraining, reskilling and upskilling of the workforce, strongly supported by the Singapore government through various schemes in collaboration with the industries and union, to deliver new business models in the age of digitisation, automation and online learning. Because of the restrictions introduced during the pandemic, in-person training has transitioned to online training and self-learning. Based on the case of Singapore, this chapter investigates the various schemes and training initiatives that have been developed through a close tripartite relationship, to close the skill and talent gaps, and to enhance talent mobility in the age of digitisation fuelled by the

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pandemic. This paper will present the case that the "Singapore model" of tripartism has enabled the country to play a role as an institutional corridor and network hub in the region.

8.2 The Singapore Model of Tripartism

> In Singapore we have the ecosystem and the support measures and you know I am proud to say that in the last 18 months there have been many support and has been overwhelming. Based on the feedback from many of you and even what local and outside people look at what Singapore is doing and…we have helped companies, businesses transform and not just company and business transform, but also workers so there's a lot of focus on training development learning and development and it will be a big journey for all of us.
>
> (Patrick Tay, Assistant Secretary-General, National Trade Union Congress [NTUC] at the Economics Recovery for the Manufacturing Sector and Workforce in Singapore Dialogue, 17 September 2021)

Singapore's economy recorded a full-year GDP contraction of 5.8 per cent in 2020 during the height of the pandemic. It was the nation's worst recession since its independence in 1965. The economy struggled to deal with both supply and demand shocks caused by global travel restrictions, supply chain disruptions and the Circuit Breaker measures implemented domestically from April to June 2020 to curb the transmission of the virus (Rahmat, Ong & Thong 2021, 85). The magnitude of the economic and social impact of COVID-19 was also felt across all sectors, especially in aviation, hospitality and retail, which suffered from the greatest job losses with more than 190,000 jobs lost between Q4 2019 and Q3 2021 (Tan, 2021). Despite the worst economic downturn in the nation's history, Singapore's average unemployment rate was among the lowest at 3 per cent, compared to other advanced economies in the world (Figure 8.1).

Singapore entered the pandemic with low unemployment and the increase in unemployment during the pandemic remained relatively low. During the pandemic, the Singapore government prioritised the protection of "lives and livelihoods" in the long fight against the pandemic (Ho, 2021). The overall rate of unemployment peaked at 3.5 per cent in September 2020, surpassing the level observed during the global financial crisis, with non-resident workers bearing the brunt of job losses during the pandemic as the government's labour market policy mainly supported Singapore residents (IMF, 2021, 18–19). After the substantial jobs decline at the peak of the pandemic in 2020, total employment grew by an unprecedented 231,700 in 2022 and surpassed its pre-pandemic level by 3.0 per cent. This was largely driven by non-residents,

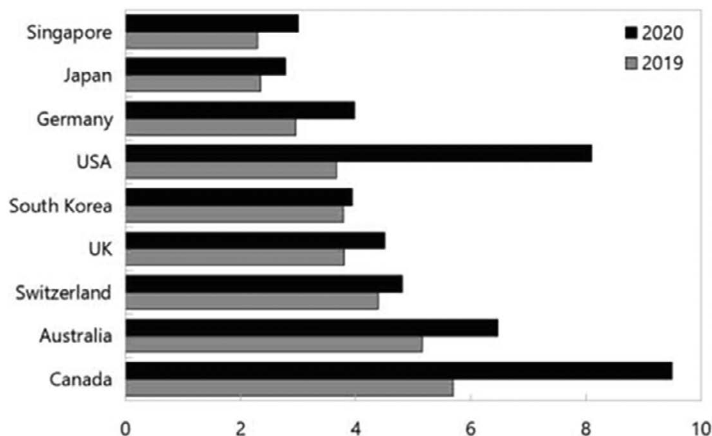

Figure 8.1 Unemployment Rate in Advanced Economies during COVID-19 Pandemic.
Source: IMF (2021).

following the relaxation of border controls in April 2022 and the backfilling of vacancies, especially in sectors such as construction, which is more reliant on foreign manpower (Ministry of Manpower, 2023).

Besides the sizable fiscal packages, namely, the unity, resilience, solidarity and fortitude budgets, which amounted to almost S$100 billion to support workers and businesses through the pandemic, it was also the tripartite ecosystem that Singapore has instituted since its independence that helped to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on Singapore's economy, business ecology and workforce. Through this tripartite model, the government, industries and unions work together to develop support mechanisms to preserve jobs and businesses, while working to address longer-term challenges such as upskilling and reskilling. To understand the Singapore tripartite model, we must look at the history and development of the model and how it was instrumental in enabling the government and key stakeholders to respond swiftly to the manpower crisis, obtain buy-in and feedback on new measures and execute difficult decisions to navigate through the pandemic. Singapore's role as a facilitator of knowledge exchange, and as China and ASEAN's strategic learning partner, is evident from the "Singapore model" of public sector administration, economic growth, managerial practices and talent development strategies (Liu and Wang, 2018, 4–5; Lee, 2021, 94–95). This also enabled Singapore to play a role as an institutional corridor and as the region's talent network hub.

8.2.1 The History and Developments of Tripartism in Singapore

Tripartism has been described as the process by which governments, employers and workers contribute to setting workplace standards and protecting

workers' rights (Simpson 1994). The hallmark of an efficacious tripartism is the advancement of an environment that enables and realises decent work for all, made possible through effective social dialogue among the tripartite partners. An effective tripartite environment promotes sound industrial relations, social justice, liveable wages, decent working conditions, sustainable enterprises and inclusive economic growth. The concept of tripartism originated in Europe during the post-war years, and the establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919 institutionalised and strengthened the concept of tripartism through social dialogues (ILO 2019). Social dialogue is defined by the ILO (2019) as the democratic process in which people who are affected by workplace decisions have a say in the decision-making and implementation procedures and it takes many forms, such as negotiation, consultation and information exchange between and among the parties on issues of common interests, as well as collective bargaining between employer and worker organisations for the purpose of dispute prevention and resolution.

Singapore's labour relations in the 1950s were chaotic and fraught with strikes and riots. In 1955 alone, there were 275 different strikes. Of these, only 97 were directly related to wage and working conditions. Much of the labour unrest was encouraged by political opposition groups who made use of the trade unions to challenge the colonial system and gain political power. There was also a weakness of the system and lack of procedures to resolve disputes at that time (NAS, 2021). Moreover, with the rapid growth of Singapore's population from 938,000 in 1947 to 1.4 million in 1957 (Saw, 2007), it created a growing unemployment crisis. The unemployment situation was not helped by the frequent industrial stoppages that threatened to bring Singapore's economy to a standstill. Confronted with high unemployment, poor working conditions and social unrest, and faced with the challenge of attracting and retaining foreign investment to create jobs for Singaporeans, industrialisation was imperative for survival as a new nation (Fashoyin, 2011, 6). Hence, trade unions affiliated with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) supported the government's call to move away from the traditional adversarial unionism and confrontational labour-management relations, to strive for industrial peace with justice. With this vision in mind, the spirit of tripartism was thus birthed (Sheldon, Gan and Morgan, 2015, 6). The tripartite model is a three-way collaboration among the Singapore government, represented by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM); the workers, represented by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the industries, represented by the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF). The model is based on the principles of co-ownership (stakeholder recognition), fair play and fair shares (stakeholder alignment) and productivity (stakeholder goals), to build a competitive economy and inclusive society together in a dynamic global environment (Ang, 2022, 4).

8.2.2 Evolution and Expansion of the Tripartism Model to Mitigate Disruptions during the Pandemic

Over the years, as Singapore's economy progresses, the Singapore model of tripartism has developed and evolved, not only to keep pace with the dynamic macroeconomic trends but to build a competitive economy and inclusive society. There were several reforms and initiatives introduced to deepen engagements and foster deeper trust among the parties and some of the key developments include the reform of labour laws. These were: the modernisation of the labour movement, the launch of the National Wages Council, the introduction of SkillsFuture and the formation of the Tripartite Alliance Limited (Figure 8.2).

The magnitude of the economic and social impact of COVID-19 was felt across sectors, leading to job losses. Singapore's model of tripartism has helped the nation navigate the COVID-19 crisis effectively. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have amplified the significance of the tripartite model that places an importance on "saving jobs" and sustaining the livelihoods of the residents. The pandemic, besides being a healthcare crisis, was also a harbinger of change for the workforce, especially with the social

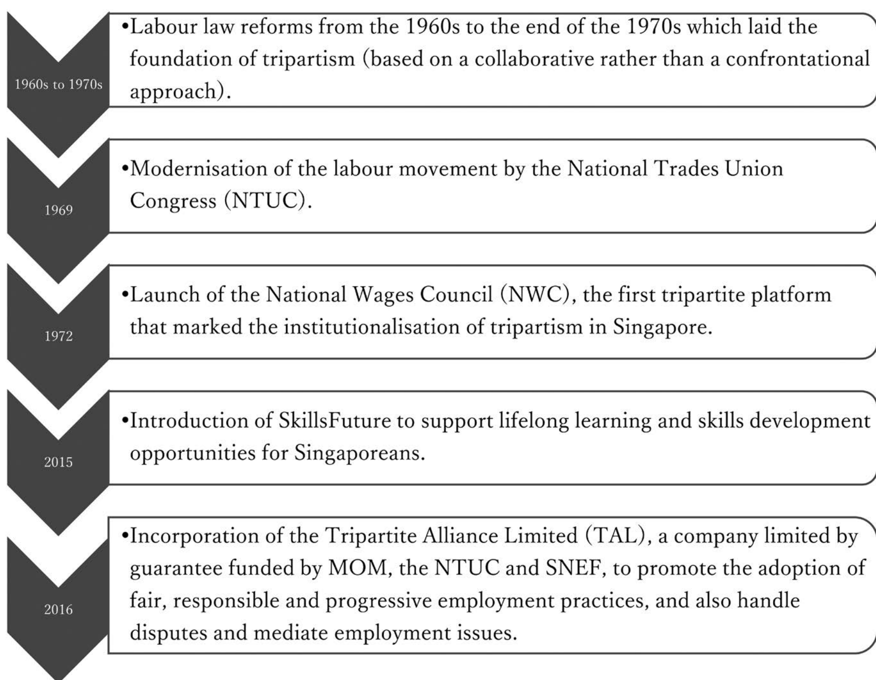

Figure 8.2 Key Developments of the Singapore Tripartite Model.

Source: Adapted from Ang (2022, 19).

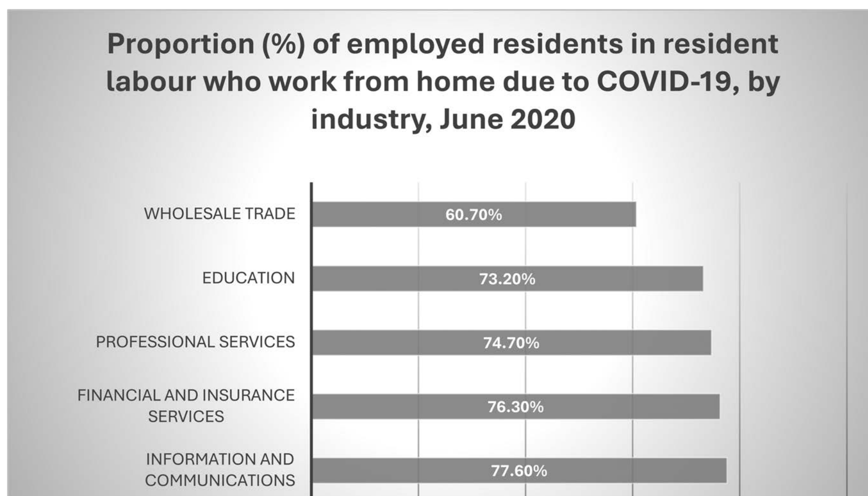

Figure 8.3 Proportion (%) of Employed Residents in Resident Labour Who Work from Home due to COVID-19, by Industry as of June 2020.

Source: MOM (2020).

distancing measurements in place that triggered the need to work from home (WFH) and to conduct businesses through online platforms (Figure 8.3).

It has also accelerated digitisation, increasing trends in e-commerce and automation. In Singapore, a report by KPMG on digital transformation and the workforce of the future (KPMG, 2020, 2) highlighted that 72 per cent of CEOs in Singapore had seen their new digital business models accelerate during the COVID-19 period. Hence, workers needed to be reskilled and upskilled to keep their jobs or to switch jobs. In response to COVID-19's impact on the economy and labour market and recognising the urgency of keeping people's livelihoods, a key tripartite focus was workforce training and upgrading, specifically in digital skills. The tripartite membership also expanded to include all agencies, trade associations and business chambers, to put in place a whole-of-government, multi-pronged strategy to execute and implement the schemes and initiatives during the pandemic (Figure 8.4).

The Singaporean government launched four fiscal packages and used all of its resources to combat the greatest economic crisis the nation had faced since gaining its independence. These were the budgets for unity, resilience, solidarity and fortitude, which set aside about S$100 billion to help businesses and employees combat the effects of the pandemic. In addition, the new National Jobs Council, a 17-member tripartite body made up of eight ministers, and representatives from the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and businesses, was formed in 2020 to spearhead the national effort to bring together jobs and skills opportunities under the SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package

Figure 8.4 Expansion of the Singapore Tripartite Model to Whole-Government-Industries Model during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Source: Author's compiled.

to support local job seekers. This package was unveiled in the May 2020 Fortitude Budget and aimed to curate close to 100,000 opportunities for local workers within a year, comprising 40,000 jobs, 25,000 traineeships and 30,000 skills training opportunities (Lee, 2025). The government co-funded traineeship allowances for fresh graduates and mid-career workers, while providing a training allowance for those enrolled in selected subsidised training programmes offered by Continuing Education and Training centres. This initiative also saw public agencies engage firms and training providers to offer traineeships and skills training programmes conducted online (Ho, 2021). Through the SGUnited Jobs and Skills package, more than 203,000 job seekers have been placed into jobs and skills opportunities as of April 2022 (MOF, 2022).

Along with managing and carrying out the Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme (SIRS), the unions also contributed to the NTUC Care Fund and Training Fund for Self-Employed Persons. SNEF also helped administer the Enhanced Work-Life Grant to provide funding support for employers to implement Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs), which were essential during the heightened Safe Management Measures (SMMs). The various tripartite institutions also stepped up their efforts to manage employment issues such as releasing guidelines to employers on responding to the developing COVID-19 situation.

In addition, public agencies such as Singapore Tourism Board (STB), Skills Future Singapore (SSG), Workforce Singapore (WSG) and Enterprise Singapore (ESG) also worked closely together with respective associations in the hotel, tourism, retail and food service industries to roll out various measures to minimise retrenchment, upskill workers and redesign jobs. Underpinning all this is the work of agencies such as the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office (SNDGO), the Government Technology Agency (GovTech) and

the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA). These organisations are responsible for driving Singapore's digital transformation effort to build a digitally ready workforce.

Next, we shall trace the journey of the government-driven Smart Nation initiative, which sets the foundation for building a digital future-ready workforce and enable the tripartite partners to support workers and businesses during the pandemic.

8.3 Digital Ready Workforce in a Smart Nation—Modelling by the Public Sector

Singapore was ranked top in the 2021 Smart City Index published by the Swiss business school Institute for Management Development, which ranked 118 'smart cities' based on residents' answers on how technology had improved their lives (IMD, 2021). Singapore's smart nation journey started in 2014 when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong outlined plans to turn Singapore into the world's first Smart Nation and launched the Smart Nation Programme Office to drive the national effort to transform Singapore into a Smart Nation. Smart Nation is integral to Singapore's next phase of nation building. Technology disruption is a global force and developments in digital technology present opportunities for Singapore to enhance its strengths, overcome national challenges and physical limits and build new sources of comparative advantage. Singapore has laid out mutually reinforcing plans to build a Digital Economy, Digital Government and a Digital Society, which are the three pillars of a Smart Nation. This widespread transformation is exemplified by building a strong digital infrastructure and service delivery, and involving the public, private and people sectors. Hence, in 2016, the Government Technology Agency (GovTech) was formed to be responsible for the delivery of government digital services to the public and the development of infrastructure to support the Smart Nation initiative. Building a digital infrastructure is necessary to accelerate the digital drive of the government, but it cannot sustain that momentum by itself and requires a pool of tech talents in the government (Lee, 2021). A future-ready digital economy relies heavily on human capital development, and Singapore tackles this through targeted upskilling and reskilling programmes. Initiatives like the TechSkills Accelerator (TeSA) equip workers with sought-after skills in artificial intelligence (AI), 5G and cybersecurity. TeSA is driven by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) and in collaboration with the industry, SkillsFuture Singapore, Workforce Singapore and the NTUC. TeSA takes an integrated approach to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) abilities, securing, professionally preparing and empowering experts to obtain the important in-demand aptitudes. It is a key component of the SkillsFuture system for IT courses and advanced career advancement in Singapore. By partnering with industry leaders and educational institutions, Singapore ensures a seamless integration of emerging technologies into the workforce.

Table 8.1 Talent Schemes Targeting Different Levels for Digital Transformation in the Government

The Smart Nation Scholarship	*Technology Associate Programme*	*Smart Nation Fellowship*
• Pre-university and university students • Groom and develop young talents or various Information and Communications Technology (ICT) leadership roles in the public sector	• Fresh graduates • Two-year exclusive leadership-trainee programme across different tech domains: application development, cybersecurity, sensors and Internet of Things (IoT), data science and AI and ICT infrastructure	• Data scientists, technologists and engineers from academia and industry in Singapore and overseas • 3- to 6-month assignment or part-time consultancy across tech domains from artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud, data science, app development, cybersecurity to sensors and IoT.

Source: Author compiled.

8.3.1 Building Capabilities in the Public Sector

In 2017, the Smart Nation & Digital Government Office (SNDGO) was formed, directly under the purview of the prime minister's office. SNDGO drives digital transformation and builds long-term capabilities for the public sector and promotes adoption of digital technologies to provide public services and participation from the public and industry. Through the different talent schemes targeting different levels of experience and expertise, the government aims to attract and recruit tech talent to transform the way the government provides services (Table 8.1).

Due to digital acceleration, customer demands are changing. Industries understand the value of upskilling and reskilling their employees to stay competitive and must figure out how to introduce new technologies into the workplace. Employees need new skills and capabilities to achieve the company's goals. Skill-based development increases efficiency and makes the workforce more agile to adapt to evolving Singapore market trends. Recognising the need for the public sector leaders to dialogue, and work closely with industry leaders to transform their workforce, the GovTech Digital Academy was launched in 2021 to deepen ICT skills and groom future-ready digital leaders and public officers to be well versed in the current and future technology landscape to lead digital transformation in their respective agencies and better support industries in digitisation (Digital Academy, 2022). Equipping C-suite public sector leaders with deeper ICT skills will also enable consolidation of resources from different departments within an organisation to drive digital transformation.

8.3.2 Rapid Adoption of Digital Solutions and Platforms

When the COVID-19 outbreak hit the world, digitisation of the delivery of public services became a necessity. Before the pandemic, the Singapore government already had plans to digitise, but the pandemic accelerated the process

and many large-scale digital innovations were rolled out at unprecedented speed, from implementing digital contact tracing, to rolling out home-based learning for students, to facilitating remote working and the digital transformation of industries. As safe management measures forced businesses to switch to online platforms, the ready pool of public sector staff with digital skills was able to create content and applications on demand and implement several digital platforms in-house, such as the TraceTogether app and the SafeEntry Registration platform. These platforms were instrumental in complementing efforts in the surveillance, enforcement and engagement of individuals to ensure business continuity and keep the workforce safe during the pandemic. The SafeEntry registration, a national digital check-in system, was developed to log visits by individuals to venues providing essential services, as well as the employees in those venues. During the Circuit Breaker (CB),[1] most essential businesses, such as supermarkets, clinics and retail outlets, adopted the SafeEntry system. To ensure smooth implementation, relevant ministries worked with operators of premises to deploy the SafeEntry system in wider communities, including schools, workplaces, healthcare facilities, shopping malls and hotels (Lee, Lee and Liu, 2023, 4). The officers as developers of the apps were able to engage and educate businesses to troubleshoot and adopt the apps in a very short time frame.

Educating and engaging the public was a key approach in Singapore in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharing of daily information and providing updates by the task force to the public through press conferences not only showed transparency but was also a way of discrediting fake news being circulated through social media (Lee, Lee and Liu, 2023, 5). As the public sector already had the various digital systems in place, it was able to tweak or adjust existing e-government platforms to fit the purpose during the pandemic. For example, the gov.sg official government online portal was the primary authority source for the latest policy announcements, information and news regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Singapore. WhatsApp has the highest penetration among social messaging apps, which is used by 88.2 per cent of the 5.3 million social media users in Singapore (Statista.com, 2025) and fake news is easily propagated through WhatsApp. Therefore, an existing government-business WhatsApp account was upgraded to match the scale and time sensitivity requirement, so that subscribers of the account could be provided with accurate and up-to-date news daily.

In addition, a suite of technology solutions under the “Stay Healthy, Go Digital!” programme was developed by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), along with Enterprise Singapore (ESG), to help SMEs and businesses set up remote working arrangements, visitor management, bill and pay and sell online. SGTech, a trade association in the tech industry, also rallied companies in the industry to put together a Digital Solutions Directory for businesses. SMEs could access online courses and webinars to upgrade their workers’ skills and receive cost-free digital consultancy from experts on best practices for crisis management (Lee, Lee and Liu, 2023).

All these efforts to build up the public sector's digital capabilities and digital services paid off: Singapore had one of the lowest fatality rates in the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, at less than 0.1 per cent, compared with the global average of about 1 per cent (Teo, 2023).

> We had one of the lowest Covid-19 death rates in the world. We have safeguarded livelihoods and kept supply chains open….
>
> (Prime Minister, then DPM, Lawrence Wong during an interview with *Straits Times* on "How Singapore Fared in its Covid-19 Fight, 21 March 2023"[2])

Despite the circuit breaker period from 7th April to 1st June, which caused major disruptions to non-essential services, as only services deemed "essential"[3] continued to operate under strict guidelines, Singapore fared well as it ranked 3rd out of 63 economies in competitiveness of economies in 2022 (MOM, 2022). Even as non-essential services were permitted to resume gradually, many companies in work areas with higher physical proximity continued to deploy automation and AI in warehouses, grocery stores, call centres and manufacturing plants to reduce workplace density and cope with surges in demand. Consequently, occupations such as cashiers, bank tellers and salespersons were affected and displaced as operations were gradually automated and shifted to digital platforms.

Post-pandemic, such jobs may not return as industries such as hotels and restaurants that have turned to self-service/self-help kiosks, which allow customers to check in or place orders directly, are likely to continue with such arrangements. Digitisation in retail industries can streamline online ordering, add chatbots and improve delivery systems.

To revive the labour market, NTUC, with the support of the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), and trade associations and chambers, initiated the Job Security Council (JSC) to better match retrenched workers with job vacancies and form. This created an ecosystem of companies consisting of multinational corporations, startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to take in skilled workers who were displaced. In addition, to assist employers with responsible cost-cutting and equitable layoffs, the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) hosted webinars. Meanwhile, the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management (TADM) tested an online dispute resolution procedure and a phone advisory option that enabled disagreements to be settled without face-to-face meetings. Other agencies, like the Workplace Safety and Health Council (WSHC), shifted their engagement platforms online to conduct e-forums and webinars (TAL, 2021, 19).

The close tripartite engagements and social dialogues also led to the various initiatives, job schemes and SkillsFuture training being implemented in the hotel, food and beverage (F&B) and retail sectors through the Industry Transformation Maps (ITMs). ITMs are an embodiment of how tripartism

works in Singapore as employers come together to work with tripartite partners, to nurture and upskill their workers to embrace digital technologies and create pathways for workers to grow and fulfil their potential. ITMs are not just about lifelong employability but also create opportunities by holistically growing the Singapore economy and companies through digitalisation, innovation and internationalisation.

8.4 Digital Transformation of Workplace and Workforce in Hotel, Food and Retail Sectors

Prior to the pandemic, several trends were already affecting the global workforce, and technology was becoming more important in enabling workplace flexibility and automation. The pandemic required strict rules, such as social distancing and workplace upheaval, and caused organisations to respond and adapt to the changes in order to manage the workforce and focus on employee wellbeing, while sustaining operations (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020, 184; Gigauri, 2020, 16). Consequently, the pandemic, which forced the shutdown of in-person engagements, further accelerated digital transformation and the gig economy and impacted businesses across industries and sectors. Besides the aviation sector, customer-facing sectors such as hotel, F&B and retail industries were the most affected due to the closure of international borders and physical spaces, as well as limitations on the number of patrons.

8.4.1 Implementation of Self-Help Digital Kiosks in Adherence with Mandatory Physical Safe Management Measures in F&B and Retail Outlets

The COVID-19 pandemic, the CB restrictions and subsequent social distancing measures had caused a significant impact on the F&B services and retail sectors in Singapore.

Following a Chinese New Year private dinner function attended by 200, which became a COVID cluster in February 2020, it led to the suspension of events and gatherings with 250 or more participants, to reduce the risk of further local transmission of COVID-19. A list of safe distancing measures was drawn up by Enterprise Singapore (ESG) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) for the retail and F&B services to provide a safer shopping and dining experience. These guidelines were made mandatory to ensure that there was enough space between customers in a queue, encourage them to use self-check-ins/check-outs and to limit the number of shoppers in stores. While fast-food establishments and large supermarket chains already had digital self-help systems in place, the rest of the standalone outlets, which consisted of largely SMEs, had to quickly implement automated systems to continue operations. To make it easy for SMEs to adopt digital solutions, the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) provided SMEs with a list of pre-approved solutions supported by reliable vendors. SMEs interested in adopting these solutions could apply

for the Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG) to obtain up to 70 per cent of funding, which was revised later. In addition to self-help kiosks and apps, robots were also deployed for last-mile delivery at some F&B outlets to reduce interactions.

8.4.2 Enhancing Digital Presence and E-Commerce Capabilities

The food services industry plays a vital role in Singapore's economy, contributing S$4 billion to the economy and employing about 220,300 workers in 2021 (Department of Statistics, 2021). The retail sector encompasses a wide range of businesses, from supermarkets and convenience stores to fashion and furniture. Buying and selling of goods and services takes place through many channels, such as stores, kiosks, mail and the Internet, and contributes about 1.4 per cent to the GDP (Ministry of Education, 2021). The CB measures included the closure of businesses that provided non-essential services. Only food, pharmaceutical and hardware retail businesses were considered essential. F&B services, including hawker centres, food courts, coffeeshops and establishments that sold hot/cooked snacks and bread, were only allowed to be open for takeaways and delivery services. Consumers were compelled to turn to online shopping and delivery services instead. Retailers with strong in-house online platforms and sophisticated data analysis succeeded in connecting with consumers and offering them additional services and value. Others leveraged online platforms such as Amazon, Lazada and Shoppee. Many dine-in establishments also had to switch to a delivery model. There was an accelerated shift from in-store to online sales in 2020 for the retail and F&B services sectors as businesses and consumer behaviour adapted to the COVID-19 situation. Online sales outpaced in-store sales, and there was a strong divergence between in-store and online sales trends.

To equip businesses in the F&B and retail sectors to switch to online mode, a 'food delivery booster package' and an 'e-commerce booster package' were launched by the government (Lee, Lee, and Liu, 2023). The 'food delivery booster package' supported F&B businesses in managing food delivery costs and equipped restaurants with the tools and capabilities for online delivery sales and in building a strong digital presence. Capability development packages valued at more than S$1,500 were offered to those onboarding Deliveroo, foodpanda and GrabFood platforms. The e-commerce booster package, in partnership with Amazon, Lazada Singapore, Qoo10 and Shopee, supported 90 per cent of the cost for retailers to sell their products online for domestic and overseas markets. In Singapore, the E-Commerce Programme supported local retailers to expand their local market connections and distribute products to foreign countries with the help from digital channels. In addition, the government also provided a series of online coaching sessions on digital storytelling with consultants for businesses to create narratives for their brands, digital products and services that resonated with their customer base. To increase the online presence of the SMEs, a consolidated effort by the government to fund media partners (for example, Facebook and Warner

Media Entertainment Networks) was made to develop content to help SMEs reach out to potential customers (Lee, Lee and Liu, 2023).

8.4.3 Technology Augmentation in Hotel Sector to Redesign Jobs

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the hotel industry was faced with the challenge of employee retention, as it was challenging to sustain a full workforce with demand close to zero, due to the severe travel restrictions. Despite some relief provided by the gradual resumption of activities such as staycations, and the bilateral arrangements worked out among various countries for safe cross-border travel, however, the surplus manpower remained, even as hotels adapted to a new normal of operation in which mandatory safe distancing measurements limited visitor numbers and on-site staff. There was a need to redesign jobs by augmenting the roles with technology, and not displacing employees.

Even before the pandemic, the hotel industry was already exploring ways to replace manual labour and promote service concepts that require less manpower to operate, as well as to enable employees to perform higher-value work. Job redesign by augmenting manual work with technology could enable housekeepers to become supervisors of cleaning robots using mobile applications, and front desk staff to offer personalised services to enhance guest experience, rather than conducting mundane check-in/out work. To support the push towards job redesign and digital transformation of the hotel industry, various government agencies in collaboration with unions and associations have rolled out numerous programmes and initiatives specific to the hotel industry, as shown in Table 8.2.

In addition, 16 job roles were identified to be redesigned with recommended technology implementation curated with inputs from the Singapore Hotel Association (SHA), Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and the Food, Drinks & Allied Workers Union (FDAWU) under the Revamped Job Redesign Reskilling (JRR) programme, as listed in Table 8.3.

8.4.4 Capability Building through the SkillsFuture Programme

Training, reskilling and upskilling of employees were integral to realising the digital transformation of the workplace and workforce. The SkillsFuture programme offers a wide selection of specially prepared programmes and resources for all Singaporeans to reskill or upskill to keep pace with changing job demands and technology advancement with support from the Future Economy Council, education and training providers and employers and unions. During the pandemic, large-scale training was conducted online so that employees could continue to be reskilled and upskilled amid social distancing policies. These programmes are designed not only to equip employees with the relevant digital skills but also to enable a mindset change towards technology. A digital skills training roadmap also serves as a guide to equip

Table 8.2 Programmes and Initiatives Launched by Government for Hotel Industry Transformation (Compiled by author)

Programme/initiative	*Agencies/organisations*	*Aim and grant supported*	*Eligibility criteria*
Career Conversion Programme for Hotel Professionals	Workforce Singapore (WSG)	• Support progressive hotels to redesign jobs for new hires and existing workers for the post-COVID-19 new norm in the following categories: 1 Job redesign enabled through technology/digitalisation 2 Job redesign in identified emerging areas: Digital Marketing and Analysis, Health, Sanitisation, and Ventilation; Revenue Management, Sustainability, Wellness, and Hybrid Experience Design 3 Functional job redesign with wage increment • Salary support for the duration of training (3 months) will be provided to employers of up to 90% of salary capped at $6,000/month	1 Registered or incorporated in Singapore 2 Committed to work with WSG or its appointed partner on the necessary administrative matters related to the programme 3 Able to meet one of the criteria: • Implemented/will implement technology and/or system that enables the job redesign into roles identified under the programme and pays a fixed monthly salary of at least $1,700 after the completion of the programme • Implement job redesign into one of the six identified emerging areas, and pays a fixed monthly salary of at least $1,700 after the completion of the programme • Implement mid- to long-term functional job redesign, and pays an increased salary with a fixed monthly salary of at least $1,700 or 5% wage increment, whichever is higher after the completion of the programme 4 Committed to continuous reskilling and training arrangements.

(*Continued*)

Table 8.2 (Continued)

Programme/initiative	*Agencies/organisations*	*Aim and grant supported*	*Eligibility criteria*
Hotel Industry Digital Plan	Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA); Singapore Tourism Board (STB)	• Part of the SMEs Go Digital programme, which aims to make going digital simple for SMEs. The Hotel IDP provides a step-by-step guide on the digital solutions local SMEs in the hotel industry can adopt at each stage of their growth. • Eligible SMEs can receive funding support from the Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG) or other relevant grants	Local SMEs in the hotel industry.
Job Redesign Reskilling (JRR) Programme for the Hotel Industry under the Professional Conversion Programme	Workforce Singapore (WSG), Singapore Hotel Association (SHA), the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and the Food, Drinks and Allied Workers Union (FDAWU)	• Revamped and enhanced the to continue supporting of job redesign projects rolled out in tandem with hotels' adoption of technology. • Hotel staff were trained in emerging skills aligned with the digitisation efforts to bring about career progression and productivity. Training comprises external classroom training and in-house classroom/on-the-job training. • Hotels can receive up to 90% of the course fee funding and salary support for the training duration, capped at 3 months. Salary support differs between non-PMET (up to 90% of salary capped at $3,000/month) and PMET (up to 90% of salary capped at $6,000/ month) employees.	1 Registered or incorporated in Singapore 2 Committed to work with WSG or its appointed partner on the necessary administrative matters related to the programme 3 Implemented or will implement technology and/or system that integrated the job redesign into roles depicted in the programme 4 Able to offer redesigned job roles that (i) can be found in the programme and (ii) pay monthly gross salaries of at least $1,600 after the programme ends 5 Committed to reskilling and training arrangements.

Table 8.3 Sixteen Identified Job Roles to Be Redesigned with Recommended Technology Implementation Curated with Inputs from the SHA, STB and FDAWU under the JRR Programme

S/N	*Job role*	*Redesigned/ revamped job role*	*Supporting technology*
1	Front Office Officer/Guest Services Officer/ Guest Relations Agent	Guest Experience Designer	• Self-check-in/out kiosks • Robotic process • Automation • Mobile check-in with facial-recognition smart cameras • Express check-out box with RFID and RPA • Customer relationship management system (CRM)
2	Concierge	Guest Experience Ambassador	• Digital concierge/Chatbot • CRMS
3	Bellhop/Bell Attendant	Safety Support Officer	• Autonomous luggage cart integrated with lifts • Automated baggage storage system
4	Security Officer	Safety and Security Officer	• Video surveillance technology • Smart cameras and IoT sensors • Facial recognition analytics
5	F&B/Kitchen Coordinator	Kitchen Officer	• Automated temperature measuring and recording system • Smart IoT sensors to count the stock quantity • Robotic Process Automation software to generate purchase orders • Integrated occupancy and table management system • Food waste-tracking AI machine
6	Service Crew	F&B Ambassador	• Digital menu • Mobile applications
7	F&B Supervisor/ loor Manager/ Shift Manager/ Head Waiter	Service Supervisor	• Digital menu • Mobile applications • CRMS integrated with cameras • Manpower scheduling solution
8	Housekeeping/ Public Area Supervisor	Housekeeping Supervisor	• e-housekeeping system • Scheduling app • Predictive analytics
9	Housekeeping/ Public Area Attendant	Housekeeping Specialist	• Motorised pushcart • Cleaning robots • Linen cart robots • Auto-inventory management system

(*Continued*)

Table 8.3 (Continued)

S/N	*Job role*	*Redesigned/ revamped job role*	*Supporting technology*
10	Engineer	Engineer and Sustainability Lead	• Smart IoT sensors • Engineering job despatch system integrated with human resource (HR) system • Integrated smart building and facilities management system
11	Technician	Technician Sustainability Specialist	• Smart IoT sensors • Engineering job despatch system integrated with HR system • Integrated smart building and facilities management system
12	Human Resource Executive	Human Resource Generalist	• Human resource information system • Applicant tracking system
12	Human Resource Executive	Human Resource Generalist	• Human resource information system • Applicant tracking system
13	Event/Catering/ Banquet Sales Executive	Meetings and Event Technology Executive	• Virtual reality (VR) goggles • Cloud-based event management system
14	Reservations/ Revenue Management Executive	Revenue and Experience Executive	• Real-time monitoring software • AI-powered • Revenue management system (RMS) • RPA
15	Marketing Executive	Digital Marketing Executive	• RMS • Beacons • Smart cameras with facial recognition capabilities • Location-based marketing platform • Smart cloud-based online reputation management system
16	Head Chef	Head Chef and Technologist	• Robotics • Data management systems

Source: Singapore Tourism Board (2022).

companies and employees with the necessary skills (including change management) to adopt digital solutions at each stage of growth. These training programmes are aligned to the Skills Framework and emerging areas under the SkillsFuture Series (IMDA, 2022). For example, the SkillsFuture for Digital Workplace is designed to cultivate learning agility and improve digital confidence and prepare the worker to be future-ready in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. It helps trainees to understand the work trends, the use of technology in the future economy, the measures

against common cybersecurity threats and know the different avenues for self-directed learning (CourseWSQ, 2020). This will help them change their mindset towards technology and increase their confidence in working in a technology-rich environment, as well as develop an action plan for continuous lifelong learning.

8.5 Conclusion: Demand for Digital Skills and Critical Role of Tripartism in the Post-COVID World

> This is actually a showcase of Singapore's tripartite relations where the workforce which represented by the union, NTUC working very closely with enterprises, represented by SNEF and the government represented by the Ministry of Manpower come together and that trust built over many, many decades, was put to actually a test and put to actually good use as well. So a lot of things were being able to be executed and implemented readily because the trust between the tripartite partners and the understanding that this is all for a longer term and to continue to progress further for the sake of the country, the people and the enterprises was very clear.
>
> (Mr. Douglas Foo, Sakae Holdings)

The tripartite model of saving jobs through digital skills development during the COVID-19 crisis demonstrates the collaborative spirit of the tripartite partners in navigating multilevel disruptions to the workforce and reinforces Singapore's strong foundation of industrial relationships. It illustrates how the various tripartite partners have served as essential channels in disseminating information from the government, providing bottom-up feedback to policy makers, and in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on employers and employees in Singapore. The pandemic has hastened industry transformation and the demand for digital skills will continue to soar across all sectors. Tripartite leaders are urging businesses to reevaluate work processes and create a conducive learning environment by collaborating with tertiary institutions to enable lifelong employability. Digital technologies like AI, IoT and cloud computing are bringing about a massive shift in the world of work. It is inevitable that some traditional roles will be replaced by automation; others will see AI and machine learning as tools to make humans more productive and insightful. Organisations across all sectors, from agribusiness, finance and manufacturing to media, are evolving into technology companies. To show how today's jobs and skills landscape is dominated by digitisation and automation, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and LinkedIn jointly prepared a report to analyse the digital jobs, skills and qualifications that employers are looking for as well as the impact of COVID-19 on job trends (ADB and Linked In, 2022, 5). The report, which covered India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as Australia, Singapore and the United States, listed the digital skills needed for the top jobs in demand (refer to Table 8.4).

Table 8.4 Ranking of Digital Skills Most in Demand by Country

Rank	*Australia*	*Indonesia*	*India*	*Malaysia*	*Philippines*	*Singapore*	*United States*
1	Microsoft Office	Adobe Photoshop	SQL	Adobe Photoshop	JavaScript	JavaScript	Microsoft Office
2	JavaScript	Adobe Illustrator	JavaScript	Adobe Illustrator	SQL	Java	JavaScript
3	SQL	Microsoft Office	Java	JavaScript	HTML	SQL	SQL
4	Java	JavaScript	HTML	SQL	Java	Python Programming Language	Java
5	C#	Logo Design	C Programming Language	Microsoft Office	Cascading Style Sheets	C#	Python Programming Language
6	Agile methodologies	PHP	MySQL	Java	MySQL	HTML	Social Media
7	Python Programming Language	MySQL	Cascading Style Sheets	HTML	Adobe Photoshop	C++	Agile methodologies
8	Git	Java	C++	MySQL	C#	MySQL	C#
9	Requirements analysis	HTML	Python Programming Language	C#	Microsoft Office	Cascading Style Sheets	Git
10	Amazon Web Services	SQL	jQuery	Cascading Style Sheets	Adobe Illustrator	Git	C++

Source: Reproduced from ADB and LinkedIn (2022, 13).

With more emphasis on digital skills and experiences, the traditional paper qualifications that are used to gauge a candidate's ability might no longer carry a high weightage in the selection process. With digital skills high on the recruitment agenda in all organisations and as the workforce becomes increasingly diverse, flexible and digital, it will be even more critical for all government agencies, unions and employers to work closely together to tackle emerging trends in the post-COVID world. The rapid adoption of technology-enabled solutions in the workplace can hasten the rising rate of job displacement (Cheng, 2018). Organisations are set to reduce their workforce due to technology integration, while some plan to expand their workforce for the same reason, and this phenomenon can widen the mismatch between skills and jobs (Ang, 2022, 11). The tripartite parties will have to work closely to develop innovative measures with a shared purpose of nation building and ensure sustainable economic prosperity. The tripartite model should be further expanded to include institutes of higher education and review curriculum and attachment programmes that will equip students with the digital knowledge, skills and experiences that fit the industries' needs and requirements. As the profile of workers get more diverse and with the rise of the gig economy, there is also the need to represent the views of more groups, such as gig workers and freelancers. With the phenomenon of the 'quiet quitting' young generation, viewpoints of the youths should also be considered and integrated into the dialogues to produce solutions that can better address the needs of the future workforce.

The Singapore Model of Tripartism is centred on trust and mutual respect towards all stakeholders. It aims to forge a long-term harmonious industrial relationship, and to mitigate tensions that threaten the fundamental pillars of the nation's wellbeing. It also nurtures a conducive business environment, strengthening social contracts for responsible and sustainable value creation; thus enhancing the resilience of governments and organisations to tackle shocks in the VUCA global environment.

Notes

1 The "circuit breaker" refers to Singapore's implementation of a nationwide lockdown. During this period, only essential services are permitted to function, and individuals must remain at home as much as they can. Circuit breaker measures were implemented on 7 April 2020 to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

2 Wong (2023).

3 In Singapore, essential services include those involved in the provision of food and essential health items to the public: Food suppliers (including food manufacturing, food processing and food caterers), food retail (including supermarkets, convenience stores and wet markets), food and beverages outlets (including restaurants, hawker centres, coffeeshops and food courts) and pharmacies.

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